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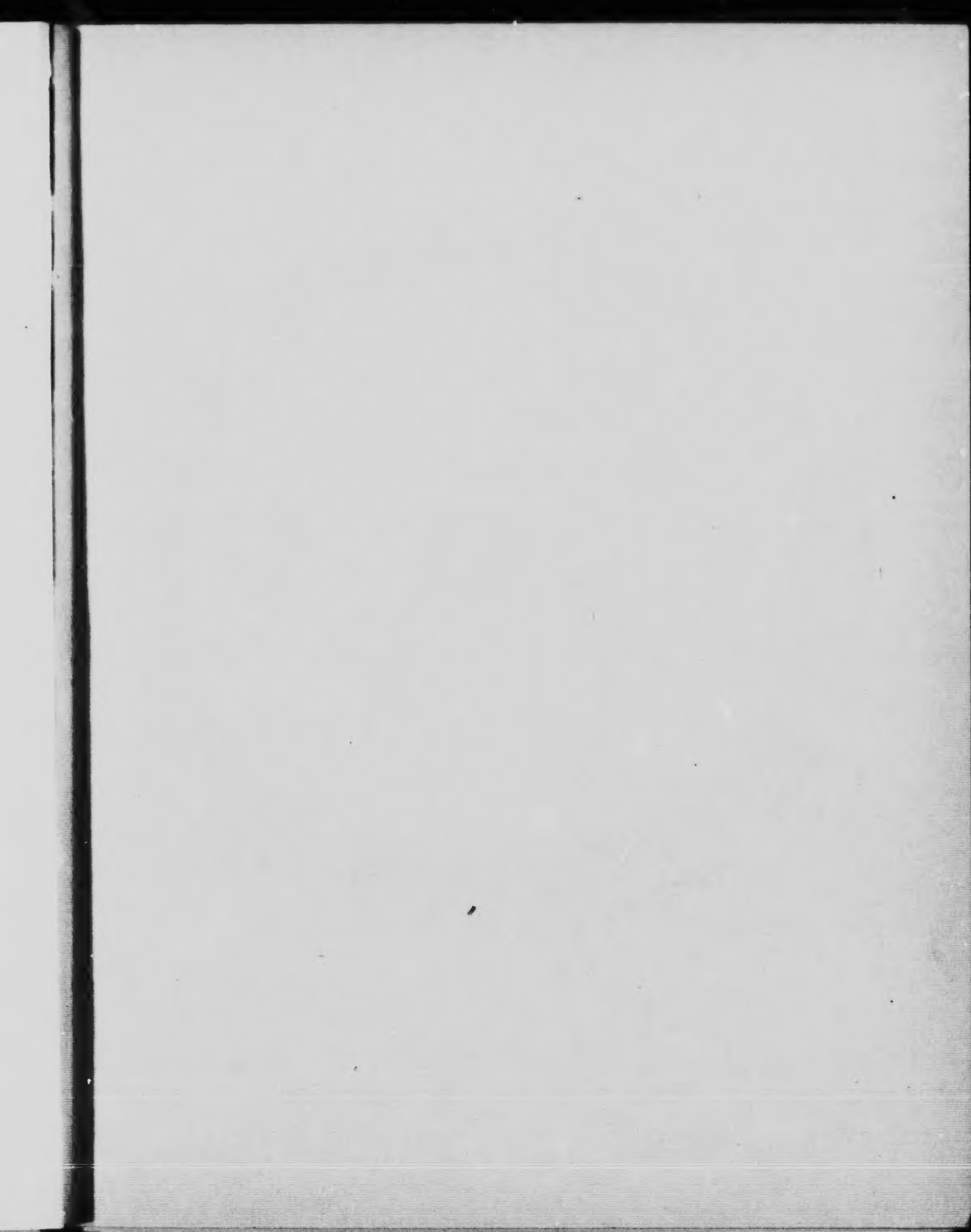
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ANTHONY VAN DYCK. A Further Study by  
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SANDRO BOTTICELLI. By ADOLF PAUL OPPÉ

LONDON: HODDER AND STOUGHTON







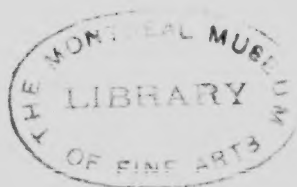
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**SANDRO BOTTICELLI**  
**BY ADOLF PAUL OPPE**  
**WITH TWENTY-FIVE PLATES IN COLOUR**  
**SELECTED AND EXECUTED UNDER THE**  
**SUPERVISION OF THE MEDICI SOCIETY**

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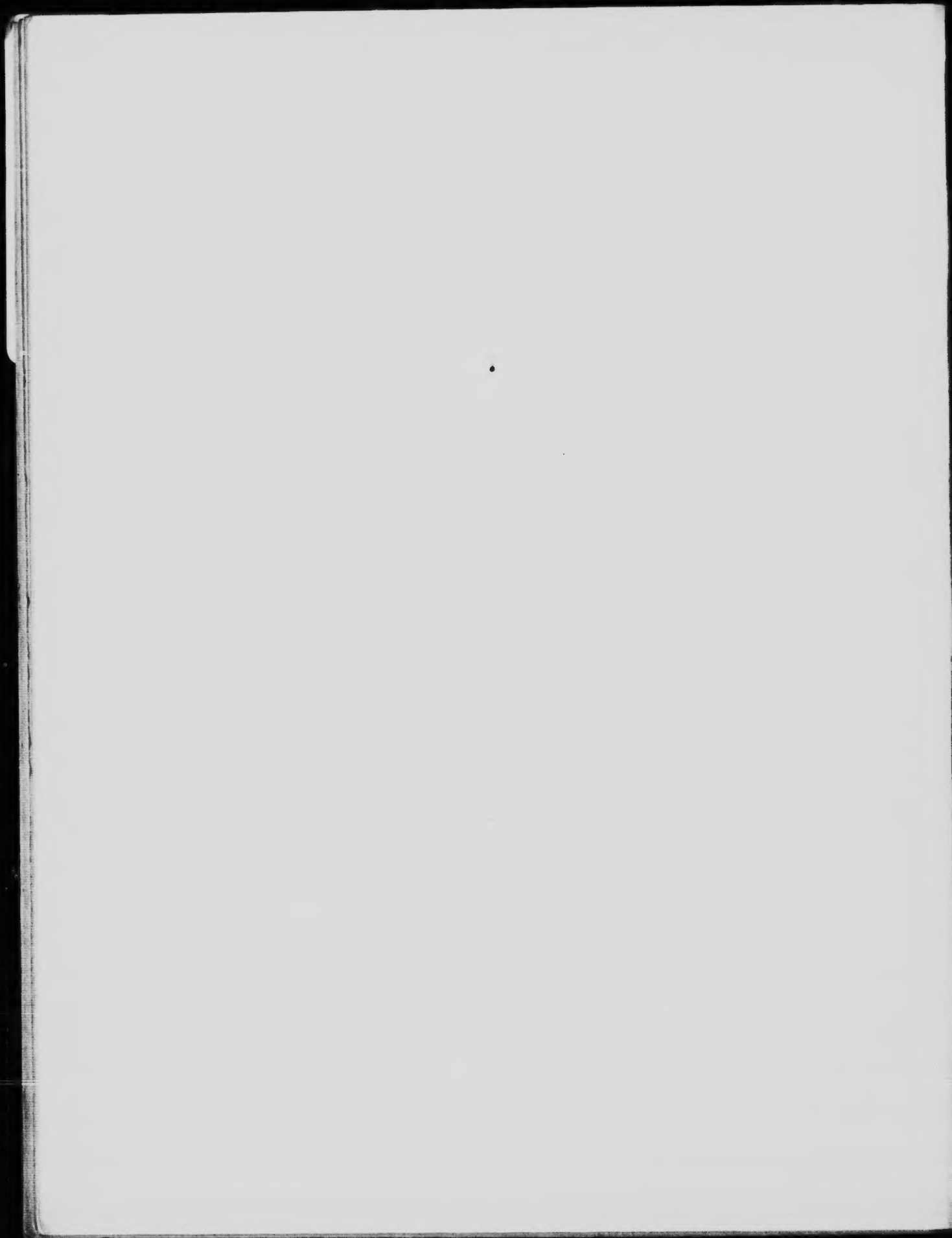


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## PREFATORY NOTE

BESIDES acknowledging my general indebtedness to Mr. HORNE for the amount that I have derived, in statements of fact, from his exhaustive book on Botticelli, I have to thank him for his kindness to me in Florence. Among other benefits, I owe to him a visit, made in his company, to the *Annunciation* which he discovered in the chapel of the Corrigendi. From my conversations with him I anticipate that he will show more indulgence than others who know less about Botticelli to my dissent in certain points from the conclusions at which he himself has arrived. The purpose of the book being to estimate the work of Botticelli as far as possible as a contemporary fact, I have not elaborated these points of difference ; the chief of which in its effect upon my view of Botticelli is that I attach greater importance to certain of the later pictures which are generally neglected as being mere products of his school.

I owe thanks also to my friend and colleague Mr. ERIC MACLAGAN for criticism, as charitable as it was valuable, when the Introduction was in proof. I am only partially responsible for the selection of the plates.



# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

|                                  |           |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| THE LIFE OF BOTTICELLI . . . . . | PAGE<br>I |
|----------------------------------|-----------|

## CHAPTER II

|                           |    |
|---------------------------|----|
| THE PAGAN WORLD . . . . . | 20 |
|---------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER III

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| THE RELIGIOUS WORLD . . . . . | 30 |
|-------------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER IV

|                                 |    |
|---------------------------------|----|
| BOTTICELLI AS PAINTER . . . . . | 47 |
|---------------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER V

|                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| THE INFLUENCE OF BOTTICELLI . . . . . | 64 |
|---------------------------------------|----|



## ILLUSTRATIONS

I. Judith.

Florence, Uffizi, No. 1156.

II. Portrait of a Man with a Medal.

Florence, Uffizi, No. 1154.

III. St. Sebastian.

Berlin, No. 1128.

IV. St. Augustine.

Florence, Ognissanti.

V. The Spring.

Florence, Academy.

VI. The Adoration of the Magi.

Florence, Uffizi.

VII. The Madonna of the Magnificat.

Florence, Uffizi, No. 1267 *bis*.



## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

### VIII. Holy Family and Saints.

Berlin, No. 106.

### IX. Virgin and Child with Angels and Saints.

Florence, Academy, No. 85.

### X. The Vision of St. Augustine.

Florence, Academy, No. 162.

### XI. Portrait of a Young Man.

London, National Gallery, No. 626.

### XII. Mars and Venus.

London, National Gallery, No. 915.

### XIII. Giovanna Tornabuoni with Venus and the Three Graces.

Paris, Louvre, No. 1297.

### XIV. Portrait of a Lady.

Florence, Pitti.

### XV. The Birth of Venus.

Florence, Uffizi, No. 39.

### XVI. Calumny.

Florence, Uffizi.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

**XVII. Pallas and the Centaur.**

Florence, Pitti Palace (Royal Apartments).

**XVIII. The Madonna of the Pomegranate.**

Florence, Uffizi, No. 1289.

**XIX. The Annunciation.**

Florence, Uffizi, No. 1316.

**XX. The Virgin and Child.**

Milan, Ambrosiana, Room D, No. 15.

**XXI. The Nativity.**

London, National Gallery, No. 1034.

## WORKS WRONGLY ASCRIBED TO BOTTICELLI

**XXII. Madonna, Child, and St. John.**

Paris, Louvre, No. 1296.

**XXIII. Madonna, Child, St. John Baptist and an Angel.**

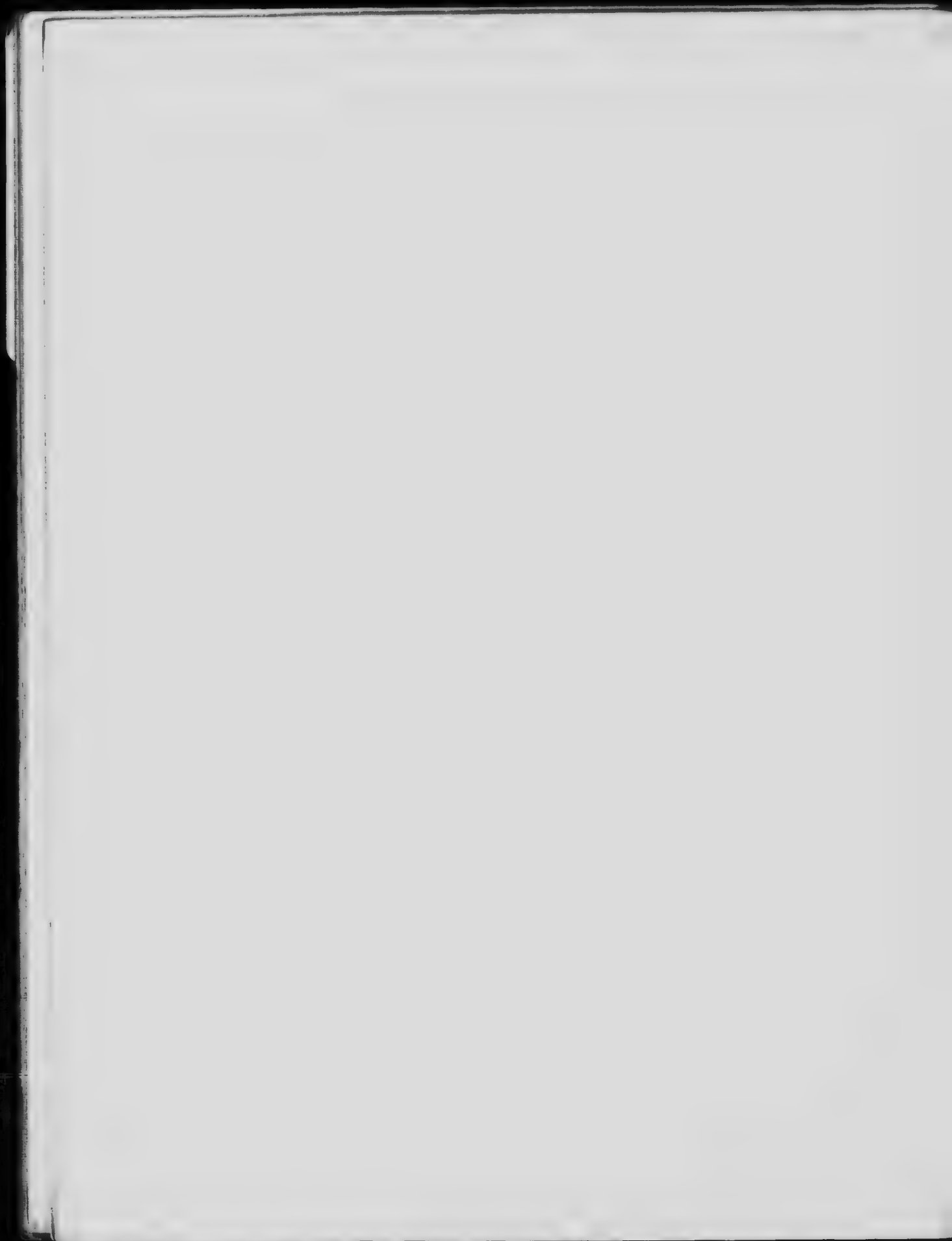
London, National Gallery, No. 275.

**XXIV. Portrait of a Woman.**

Berlin, No. 106A.

**XXV. Tobit and the Archangels.**

Florence, Academy.



# SANDRO BOTTICELLI

## CHAPTER I

### THE LIFE OF BOTTICELLI

**T**HANKS, no doubt, to the strongly marked individuality of his work, the list of Botticelli's pictures has better authority than have those of most painters of his date. There are two almost contemporary lists which show that most of the important works now assigned to him were known to be his at an early date. Vasari has little to add to these lists, and the obscurity into which Botticelli fell soon after Vasari's date prevented, in his case, until recent years the accumulation of doubtful pictures which generally has gathered round the names of more famous artists.

Possibly the same individuality of character has ensured that the traditional account of Botticelli's life is equally trustworthy in its general lines, and certainly the same obscurity during several centuries has prevented the accretion of picturesque and unreliable legends. But, though this may be true of the general lines of his story, the certainty with regard to his pictures is not equalled in the details of his life. Vasari is our only authority, and, though without his account we should know practically nothing—indeed, were it not for him we should be so ignorant of Botticelli that we should not even be able to piece to-

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

gether the few fragments of biography which can be gleaned from other sources—his facts are often wrong. There are a few scattered and casual contemporary documents by which Vasari's account can be checked, and for the circumstances of his birth and family there are certain 'Denunzie' or 'Declarations' made by his father or his brother for the purpose of Florentine taxation. These, as is the wont of returns made to the tax-collector, are not as strictly accurate as they ought to be, but they are the most authoritative records that we have.

There is nothing at all distinguished about the circumstances of his life. His father, Mariano Filipepi, was a tanner who, if we can believe his own statements to the tax-gatherer, grew poorer and poorer as his family increased, until, a few years after Alessandro was born, he declared his substance to be nothing, and his return is broken off with an appeal for mercy. The actual year of the painter's birth appears to have been 1444, but his age is differently stated in these returns. At the age of thirteen he is entered as being still at school, and as a boy of delicate health. So comparatively long a schooling argues some slightly more prosperous a home-life than the former return to the tax-collectors indicates, and indeed this return of 1457 enumerates quite a considerable list of property owned or rented by Mariano, then aged sixty-five, and unable to make more than a little by his trade. He rented two houses in the town, subletting one, a villa in the country towards Fiesole, and a shop on the other side of the Arno where, with his brother Jacopo, he exercised his trade. There

## THE LIFE OF BOTTICELLI

were bad debts also; possibly recoverable after the returns had been made. But against this comparative prosperity there had to be set a large family, consisting of Smeralda his wife, approximately aged fifty-three, four sons aged from thirteen to thirty-seven, three daughters and one grand-daughter.

According to Mr. Horne's very plausible suggestion, it is to the eldest of these sons, Giovanni, that the father's return to prosperity was due. Giovanni was a broker, and it was probably he, and not his father, who made the 'Denunzia' which gives all this information. But Giovanni appears to have done something more for his family than this. He is the first of them to be described by the nickname of Botticello. That name is given to him on the docket of this very return, and the designation recurs officially in such a way as to suggest that it belonged entirely to him. It is, of course, not known why this nickname was given to the broker, and certainly no likeness to, or liking of, the bottle prevented Botticello from doing good service to his family. So far did these services extend in the case of Sandro that the boy grew up, and went through life, under his brother's name. When not called by his proper name, Sandro di Mariano Filipepi, he is described indifferently as 'di Botticello,' as it were 'that boy of Botticello's,' Botticelli, or Botticello, and even 'dei Botticelli' as though there were a family of the name.

Vasari did not know anything about Giovanni Botticello. He therefore supposes that the young painter gained his surname, as did so many others, from his first master,

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

and accordingly invents a goldsmith called Botticelli with whom Sandro was first apprenticed. Except for the name, the goldsmith may perhaps not be entirely a figment of the imagination. Antonio, the second of Mariano's sons, followed that trade, and it is quite likely that his brother worked for some time with him. If so, he would have early come into contact with pictures, for framing, with the laying of gold backgrounds, was part of Antonio's chief occupation as a goldbeater. Documents connect Antonio with Neri di Bicci, the chief exponent at this time of an obsolete and purely ritual form of art. If this was Botticelli's first initiation into his art, his earliest associations must not be thought to lie with the refinements which he would have found in such a studio as Verocchio's, but with a retrograde and almost mechanical process for the manufacture of ornaments of an orthodox but uninspired type.

However that may be, Botticelli soon passed into the workshop of a true and great painter. Vasari and the earlier authorities alike agree in giving as the name of his master Filippo Lippi. Possibly this may be a mere inference from the character of his painting, but this evidence is sufficient for us, as it was for them. There is no record of the date when the boy entered the studio of the master, but his work shows that he remained there long enough to saturate himself with the chief features of his master's style. Filippo is known to all men as the combination of the monkish habit and the irregular life. In his art irregular living appears only as a passion for delicate beauty, and so far from detracting from the religious element of his work

## THE LIFE OF BOTTICELLI

it has given him the charm which is the essence of his religious beauty. Religious art might by itself have given Filippo his innocent and devout conceptions, his subdued Madonnas and rapt adorers—even the sweetness of colour and simplicity of attitude and line which he inherited from the convent painters Lorenzo Monaco and Fra Angelico. But only his own individual love of the choice and exquisite in external nature could have given him the poignant force of his faces and attitudes and his interest in the varying movements of the human form. The beauty of women which led him into difficulties with his monastic vows, the attraction of drapery which is certainly no business of a monk, the love for the delicate in flower or tree, architecture or external nature, which is allowed as a compensation to cloistered humanity, all these find a place in his work, and, however they may have appeared to orthodox contemporaries, their effect is now so remote and childlike that they seem not only the natural outcome of a devout mind, but also the appropriate setting for the holy story itself.

But Filippo was something more than a dainty painter of images. He was a scholar in the new school of Florentine painting, which held that the divine was never so well presented as through the human form in all its fulness of character and nobility. These men were intent on seeking out every variety of human action, character, and movement, and on rendering it adequately in their pictorial work. The great field of divine action was no doubt wider than that of human, but there was no way of even





## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

approximating to its representation but by exhausting, as far as possible, the variety of human appearances. Filippo Lippi was therefore a 'naturalist' painter, but with him, as well as the even greater men by whom he was influenced, nature was in no sense opposed to the divine, for nature was itself divinely dignified.

Trained in this school, Botticelli found the road easy to the company with which he is next found to be associated. His picture of *Fortitude* at the Uffizi is one of a series of seven Virtues which were painted about 1468 (according to Mr. Horne) by the brothers Piero and Antonio Pollaiuolo for the hall in the market of the merchants where their six magistrates sat in judgment upon commercial disputes. The Pollaiuoli, or at any rate Antonio, the elder brother, were bolder naturalists, more uncompromising draughtsmen than ever Filippo Lippi had cared to show himself. Though they were goldsmiths and decorators, they looked on the human form as the embodiment of strength and severity, rather than as a vehicle of pleasant meanings such as they expressed prodigally enough in their draperies and accessories. The other six figures of Virtues are not good examples by which to judge their work, for they have suffered grievously; but even here it is easy to mark the sculptural attempt after relief, dignity, and solidity which was the contribution of the brothers towards the formation of Botticelli's style. Very probably the *Fortitude* itself is based upon a sketch by Antonio. Its execution shows Botticelli not to have been entirely immersed in their influence, and his entrance

## THE LIFE OF BOTTICELLI

into their association was so little a defection from the tradition of Filippo, that in 1472, shortly after it was painted, and while other pictures show Botticelli to have been still strongly under their influence, Filippo's son, Filippino, became his pupil.

A further strain of naturalism in Botticelli's style may be connected with a definite incident which took place some six years after this. Filippo gave him the love of human variety and the Pollaiuoli the sense of human dignity. In 1478 he is brought into artistic relation with the painter who, more than any other in Florence, found in naturalism neither an opportunity for delicacy nor for dignity but for cruelty, blackness, and pessimistic violence. Andrea del Castagno is among painters the expression of the dark side of the Italian Renaissance; the sombre mirror of internecine wars, deep-seated hatreds, treacheries, ruthless ambitions, love of horror. Traditionally represented as a murderer, his pictures, as we know them—and indeed our knowledge of the pictures is already prejudiced by our conception of his character—are severe and black, consciously and intentionally ugly, but so full of force that they gain more by their impressiveness than they lose by their want of charm. No more suitable painter could have been found when in 1434 the effigies of certain outlawed enemies of Cosimo dei Medici were painted as hanging by the foot upon the walls of the Palace of the Podestà. In 1478 Botticelli appears as the successor of Andrea del Castagno, for he was chosen by the chief magistrates to paint upon the wall of the old

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

Bargello the figures of the eight conspirators who, led by the Pazzi, murdered Giuliano and wounded Lorenzo de' Medici while they were at service in the Cathedral. The conspiracy awoke a tumult of popular indignation. The conspirators were slain out of hand, or hunted down without regard for sacred office or foreign patronage. Art has many ways of perpetuating the memory of such events. That chosen by Florentine usage is the most direct, and is no more dignified than the illustration of modern journalism. But the work was not despised by distinguished painters, and though both Castagno's and Botticelli's figures were soon afterwards destroyed, they seem to have made a deep impression.

The great opportunity of Botticelli's life occurred two years later, in 1480, when he was thirty-six years of age. The hostility between the Pope and Florence which had resulted from the punishment of the Pazzi conspirators had been appeased, and the Pope, Sixtus IV., invited Florentine painters to decorate a chapel in the Vatican, which he had already caused to be built by a Florentine architect. Of these Botticelli appears to have been the chief, and to have undertaken not only the execution of three of the large frescoes with which the walls were decorated, and some of the figures in the spandrils of the roof, but also, according to Vasari, the general supervision of the whole decoration.

It is not clear why Botticelli was chosen for the superintendence of this work. He had previously given no evidence of ability to construct compositions of many figures on so large a scale. An early effort in Pisa appears

## THE LIFE OF BOTTICELLI

to have resulted in failure, and the *Adoration of the Magi* (Plate vi.), painted for Santa Maria Novella, the fame of which is given by Vasari as the reason for the choice of Botticelli, is small in its dimensions. Nor had he been employed by the Pope before this date, as had Domenico Ghirlandaio, the principal of the painters then associated with him. The results of the commission are equally puzzling. Vasari asserts that the three frescoes which he painted brought him great fame. But the Pope himself was best pleased with the work of Cosimo Rosselli because, so Vasari says, the clever painter had decked his fresco with more brilliant colours than did the others, and the Florentines next year, when the painters returned to Florence, very distinctly showed their preference for Ghirlandaio over Botticelli. They were associated together in the decoration of one wall in a room in the Palace of the Signoria, but Ghirlandaio was given another wall entirely to himself, a third was entrusted to Perugino together with a certain Biagio di Antonio Tucci, and the fourth to Piero Pollaiuolo. Botticelli's name is given in the entries regarding this work scarcely more prominence than that of the forgotten assistant who is associated with Perugino.

The failure of Botticelli to follow up his achievements in Rome with similar masterpieces in Florence seems to have struck Vasari as remarkable. He explains his comparative inaction by the extravagance with which he lived in Rome, squandering the goodly sums of money which the Pope paid him, and living without forethought, as was his custom. On his return to Florence he wasted his time in illustrat-

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

ing Dante for engravings, and his refusal to work was the cause of infinite disorders in his life. This account cannot be quite correct, for the edition of Dante, which seems to have been illustrated by engravings from Botticelli's designs, was published before he went to Rome, and the more considerable designs for another copy, if they were, as is possible, begun towards this time, were certainly not put aside incomplete until a much later date, and therefore cannot be held responsible for any absence of larger work at this period. It must have been either Botticelli's own disinclination for covering walls with large ecclesiastical histories, or, in spite of Vasari's assertion of the fame they brought him, a failure on his part to give satisfaction that deprived him of such commissions. With one exception, an *Adoration* for the Signoria, when the subject was one in which he had already shown his skill some four times at least, he never appears again as an ecclesiastical decorator on this large scale. Such commissions went to Ghirlandaio and to Botticelli's own pupil, Filippino Lippi. Mr. Horne rightly declares the Sistine frescoes, precisely dated as they are, to be of paramount importance in the estimation of Botticelli's character. But to others than students of his style and characteristics, these frescoes appear rather as isolated and, indeed, unsuccessful experiments than as master-works, and, to judge by the results, it does not appear that either contemporary opinion or Botticelli's own estimation differed largely from the modern view.

With this want of large ecclesiastical commissions as

## THE LIFE OF BOTTICELLI

the one outstanding fact, it is not possible to agree with Mr. Horne that Botticelli was the most popular painter in Florence during the fifteen years or so that followed his return from Rome. The chief evidence for his popularity during this period lies in the number of his imitators, who may or may not have been his pupils. It is due rather to the peculiarity of his temperament than to his popularity that Botticelli's own work is swamped by the mass of his followers', and still more that these imitators can be distinguished among themselves instead of falling into a merely common horde of characterless reproducers. His own work is very small in quantity, and his moodiness and recklessness, as Vasari would have it, allowed him to leave to others the execution even of some of his finest designs. Probably he never worked save when he was forced to it by the exigency of his commission. 'He works at home when so inclined,' says his father of him in one of his statements to the tax-collector. When not at home it was not likely that he was working anywhere else. Similarly, through his indolence, his pupils were not forced into strict reproduction of his features. Many of the school-pieces are mere copies of his pictures or variations from his designs—as is the case with the studio productions of any other master. Others are strongly imbued with some of his characteristics, but are yet individual enough to be allotted to certain more or less definite personalities. These suggest a loose agglomeration of men, trained or even working in other schools, attracted to Botticelli and helping him, or being helped by him, rather than definitely associated with him

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

in the relation of pupils or apprentices to a master. One designation for his circle has been preserved in a manuscript defence of Savonarola, written in the next century. The Academy of Idlers they are called, and very probably their easy and superficial methods of work and their jests made Botticelli and his group seem idlers and wastrels in the eyes of the sober Florentines, who saw Ghirlandaio, or Filippino, stubbornly covering day by day the enormous walls of churches. Certainly idleness and recklessness appeared to Vasari the dominant note of Botticelli's character, and recklessness meant largely, in the mouth of the serious sixteenth-century writer, a refusal to make the most of the talent that God had given him, and a failure to perfect himself, as an honest artist should, by painstaking industry and assiduity.

But, idle or not, Botticelli managed by his own work and that of his followers to impress himself deeply upon contemporary Florence. Their Madonnas, blissful, troubled or piteous, with their choirs of attendant angels, satisfied in their endless repetitions the various religious emotions of the private patrons of the day. Fancy pictures for bed fronts or for chests, adorned with stories and with allegories, brought a touch of Botticelli's real gaiety or real tragedy into many living-rooms, and prints and illustrations from his designs and those of his circle found him an even wider public. Sometimes, of course, Botticelli himself could be prevailed upon to paint more considerable works for greater patrons. He was famous for his pictures of the nude, and he made up for the want of ecclesiastical decor-



## THE LIFE OF BOTTICELLI

ation by his skill in pagan allegory. Lorenzo the Magnificent is especially mentioned by Vasari as his helper and patron. Two pictures by Botticelli were in his possession at his death. He summoned him with Ghirlandaio, Filippino and Perugino for the decoration of his villa, the Spedaletto, near Volterra. As a result of these frescoes Botticelli was recommended, together with the other three painters, to the Duke of Milan as a man likely to do well if employed in that town. The precise phrase employed in this letter—his *aria virile*, or male character—has now become famous, since it has a surprise for those who have seen in Botticelli only the somewhat sickly prototype of modern pre-Raphaelite preciousness. But Botticelli did not leave Florence, nor did he work for foreign patrons. The Volterra decorations have perished. Perhaps they were akin to those executed, not perhaps without the aid of pupils, for the villa of the young Tornabuoni, and now preserved in a fragmentary state in Paris at the Louvre (Plate XIII.).

Botticelli's relations with Lorenzo the Magnificent have been greatly exaggerated by modern writers, and it is very probable that the statements of Vasari himself are based upon a confusion between this Lorenzo and his less famous relative Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco. It was for the latter that Botticelli is recorded to have made his illustrations to Dante, and his three most important allegories, the *Spring* (Plate v.), the *Birth of Venus* (Plate xv.), and the *Pallas and the Centaur* (Plate xvii.), can be traced to the possession of his family. The two former may plausibly be supposed to have been painted for the villa at Castello,



## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

which belonged to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco and not to the Magnificent. When the latter died in 1492 the former entered into the eddies of the Florentine leadership, and Botticelli remained attached to the cause of his chief patron.

At this point there comes a change. Florence had grown overfull of its luxury and delight during the triumphant period of Lorenzo. Heads were not strong enough for this outburst of glory, and in the storm that followed all the crudenesses and evils which had been present in the luxury burst forth in a passionate catastrophe. Rival Medici contended with might and faction for the inheritance of Lorenzo's predominance. Wild excess of licence bred excess of ascetic fervour, antagonisms of conscience marshalled under the banners of rival parties. Hostile to the Medici, Savonarola, the savage reactionary, mystic and fanatical preacher of purity and retribution, inflamed the violence of his followers, and involved himself in tragedy. The elegance of the preceding ages tempts into a delusion that these Florentines were not unlike the moderns who enjoy their pictures. The Savonarolan outburst proves the opposite, and shows how different was the spirit which then expressed itself in these works from that which now shows itself in their enjoyment.

Botticelli does not seem to have become immersed in Savonarola's following with the vehemence which is usually credited to his character. His elder brother Simone, who had returned from Naples and had shared a house with him since about 1493, was ardent in Savonarola's cause from the first, entering his name in 1497 among the petitioners

## THE LIFE OF BOTTICELLI

against Savonarola's excommunication, and taking a zealous part in the disturbances, of which he afterwards wrote an account. But Botticelli did not join him at once. In July 1497 he was still working for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, who was the chief of Savonarola's enemies, and in 1498 he painted for the Vespucci, who were also of the faction hostile to the preacher. Yet about the same time he designed a sheet illustrating Savonarola's teaching, and by the end of 1498, after Savonarola's execution, he may have openly professed his adherence. He was too late, of course, to join in the bonfires in which the Florentines made sacrifice of jewels, pictures, robes, ornaments and every sign of luxury, and where he may have watched some of his own work destroyed in a conflict of feeling between his not yet convinced sense of the righteousness of the act and his still living love for pagan beauty. After Savonarola's death, Botticelli's workshop became a centre of Savonarolan talk. Simone tells in his Chronicle how one Dozzo Spini, who had been a leading instigator of the ordeal by fire, confessed there how lightly the proposal had been made. By this time some of the bitterness must have died down, but Botticelli held fast to the mystic ideas of the dead leader. In 1500 he painted the picture of the *Nativity*, which is now in London (Plate XXI.), and placed upon it a long and mystic inscription, telling of his hopes of a new coming, and of the desperate horrors of the time in which the work was painted.

This picture is a pamphlet of Savonarolan views, but unfortunately for consistency of narrative its evidence is

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

immediately contradicted. Two years later the ambassador to Isabella d'Este recommended Botticelli to the princess as a likely painter in place of Perugino for a panel in her famous room at Mantua. He is recommended with praise for his skill, and he is said to work willingly and, unlike Filippino, who was too busy, to have no hindrances. Nothing came of the recommendation, for Perugino ultimately undertook the work, but the picture could scarcely have failed to contain some of those nude figures which shocked the preacher, and had been cast into the bonfire a few years before. Yet Botticelli expressed himself as ready to undertake the work at once and to serve the princess with good-will. He found no 'hindrance,' as the ambassador has it, in his pietistic views. Most probably his fervour had died down, giving way before that recklessness and indolence which Vasari again lays to his charge in the last years of his life, stating that his faults brought him into obscurity and wretchedness. This is an exaggerated account, no doubt, for there is evidence to show that Botticelli was never actually destitute; but again Vasari wishes to explain the unnecessary inaction of a painter at a time when there was no need for any man to starve who had attained such eminence as Botticelli. Very probably the hard-working Michelangelo was Vasari's authority, for he and Botticelli had been associated in the circle of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, and they had ties in their common love of Dante and in their admiration for Savonarola, when Michelangelo had few friends in Florence and fewer still among its artists.

## THE LIFE OF BOTTICELLI

But in spite of, perhaps because of, his indolence and recklessness, Botticelli spent his last days in pleasant places. He lived in the Ognissanti quarter of Florence in the house, now belonging to his nephews, where he had always lived. He himself with his brother Simone had a country-house on the slopes of Bellosguardo, which was then, as now, covered with vines and olives, and was reached by winding stone-walled paths opening or turning now and again into vistas over plain and mountain. Here he played jests against his neighbour the hosier, painted, perhaps, but chiefly idled with his now somewhat chastened company of unemployed. Even if the end of his life was not, as Vasari has it, a tragedy of unfulfilled intentions and promise thrown away, or spent in religious fervour and burning repentance, as is suggested by some of the pictures which are assigned to him at this period, yet the end was sad. His death came after that of all his contemporaries, and his work, however popular it might be among those who were not sufficient judges to remark on its slovenliness of execution, was old and out of date in the eyes of the new generation. Men now flocked to see the masterpieces in a new manner by Leonardo and Michelangelo, and found there the solution of problems which Botticelli had faced, but never overcome.

He died in May 1510. He was buried in the cloisters of the church of the Ognissanti, where he had painted one of his first great pictures, the *St. Augustine in his Study*, and in the centre of the part of Florence from

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

which he had scarcely ever moved. His death was almost unrecorded. Vasari mistook its date; the entry in the registers makes a wrong record of his name. He was childless and unmarried. He left behind him some pictures and a few jests and the memory of a life which had some moments of brilliant achievement, but on the whole had failed.

Passionate, careless, vehement, above all moody and unaccountable, such is the character which emerges clearly from his work and the scant tradition which accompanies his name. Pagan and then Pietist—perhaps Pagan again, a famous jester, full of enjoyment and of feeling, without conscience, irregular, he is the type of the artistic temperament as we know it now. He had the characteristics which mark off the artist from the modern citizen, not those which marked off the artist from the ordinary Florentine citizen of his day. Therefore he shocked Vasari, but to us he seems familiar and sympathetic. His face, as painted by himself or by his pupil Filippino, is one of those irregular, passionate, penetrating countenances which might be found to-day. He gives himself the look of his own creations, not handsome in the ordinary sense of the word, but powerful and strongly characterised, full of charm and of repulsion, not great, majestic or dignified, but interesting, attractive and repellent, swayed by emotions and moods, human, with something of the divine and no little of the beast. He was not one of the world's unapproachable heroes, men whom admiration cannot reach, but one of the wider circle of the elect, whom you are at

## THE LIFE OF BOTTICELLI

liberty to hate or love according to your own temperament, who disappoint their lovers by never rising to the height at which the heat of their love would have them placed, and equally dismay their haters by never resting in the depths to which their hatred gladly sees them descend.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PAGAN WORLD

**S**ANDRO BOTTICELLI, then, was a man whom his contemporaries were free to like or dislike, love or hate, value or disregard according to their own temperaments. No doubt many hated him, and more distrusted him. They accused him of unreliability in his work and character, of excesses, of secret vices, and probably they had good cause. Others no doubt loved him for all his faults, some perhaps because of them. No one admired him for greatness of character, for outstanding virtues. On the contrary, they held that he failed in his art because of his faults of character, for his inferiority among men in the nobler characteristics. They may have felt that he stood away from them, though probably they did not, but they certainly would not have ever thought that he stood above them. It was possible to have two views about him. He was a question of taste, not a test of right feeling. For us, to whom the character of the man has only a historic interest, his paintings have the same effect. He, of all painters, put his peculiarities of personality and temperament into his work; unless, indeed, our and Vasari's view of his character is a mere inference from his painting. There-

## THE PAGAN WORLD

fore we are free, as were his contemporaries with his character, to take him or leave him, according to our taste.

See, for instance, his *Birth of Venus* at the Uffizi (Plate xv.), and look at it, as without unusual fortune the traveller is bound to see it, over the heads of a crowd of sightseers; as one might meet a man in the crowd of vapid, characterless folk who fill the ways of men. Then, even in spite of the prominence which fashion has given it, the picture has not really the strength to detach itself from, and enforce itself over, the mass of futile people who surge through the gallery, gazing vacantly at picture after picture, enjoying nothing honestly, disliking nothing spontaneously. It is too thin, too slight, too fragile, to enforce itself above empty and hideous humanity. Its fragrance is too delicate and slight, its atmosphere too remote and individual. You must have it alone and in its entirety for its true nature to appear to you; or, if there are others present, you must have such community and sympathy with its spirit that it speaks to you and to you alone, and the mass recedes into spaces more remote by far than those of the picture itself.

Then, you can catch from the picture the breath of the sea and of the cool wind that blows the slender maiden to the embracing land. She is no goddess advancing to the labours she has to perform on earth and to her dominion amongst men. There is no hint of the grandeur of her place among the gods; no majesty of the opening history of a heroic life, no orchestration of the elements heralding a glory and a catastrophe to men. This is not Venus in all



## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

her fulness; neither the Venus of noble and full humanity, nor yet the Venus of sensuality and riot. There is nothing in the picture but a nymph blown ashore on a cool morning, one maid attending her, silence in the corner of a remote island, emptiness and stillness in the continent beyond. It is a little picture in spite of its large size, a vignette or cameo from Dante or from Spenser, a detached vision or a dreamy incident, leading to little or to nothing. It is just a breath of delicately gilded and glorified romantic life and a moment of poetry, not grand, not noble, not studied, not human, but exquisitely imagined—a smile or a sigh embodied in a half-lyric note of fancied scenery and form.

There is the sea, first, and its moment of freshness. It is early morning. Botticelli does not attempt to represent in one ideal instant the whole concentrated nature of the sea, with all its moods, its features of colour and movement, depth and surface; nor yet to exhaust the visible appearance of the sea in the actual moment in which he wishes to present it. He gives only a hint of the sea's actual form and colour by one of those flashes of brilliant childishness which make the greater element in Japanese art. Rhythm there is not, for the rippling movement which he is seeking is not rhythmic. It is rather an absence of rhythm, an all-pervading melody springing up simultaneously on every side, like a rapid, throbbing ecstasy of muted notes. But there are forms enough for suggestiveness in the careless white arrowheads of foam and in the simple colouring of the sea itself.

## THE PAGAN WORLD

Next, there are the roses falling everywhere, gently and lightly, as they are carried by the wind which flicks the sea with foam. They are half-wild, half-cultivated flowers, much thinner and scantier than ours, as the grey-green sea is lighter and gentler than our deep Northern oceans; as the bright Southern air is lighter than our misted atmosphere. But even Southern roses never bloomed with the dreamy fragility of these scattered flowers. Life curls their petals with a more rounded fulness, or bends their edges with a more elastic vigour. The passing of time has done something to dry the sap of these summer blossoms and to embalm them as it were in an everlasting fadedness, but this is not all that distinguishes them from the living flower. Half-conventional, half-realised shadows of the blossom, they never grew into fulness with scent and dew and sap, but from the first they were idealised memories of the flower, truer to one aspect of it than any unselected presentment of the whole, but still partial and distant renderings, inestimably refined and precious.

The flowers and the sea give the note of Botticelli's achievement. In the figures there is the same delicate and fragrant lissomness and lightness, the same slightness of form and troubled tenderness of expression. They are built of frailer stuff than flesh, something that is the sport of the winds, something that shivers lightly with the promise of morning and yet is open and delicate with the innocence of day. For this, Botticelli gives you dainty elongated limbs with choice dancing poses, and bodies not

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

quite steadily set upon their feet, excessively sloping shoulders, well modelled feet and hands, and heads that are somewhat too small. For this, too, his draperies are flimsy and delicate as they are upon the arms of the attendant. When they are intended to be in motion and to flow in the wind, the draperies become contorted ; for broad and simple folds would be too strong and open,—too much in keeping with the strength of midday and the larger, more perfect man,—to suit this scene of morning and fitful breeze, and these fairy-like emanations of the fancy. For this, too, the hair waves slenderly in its long coils. The masses of blown hair which Michelangelo loved stand to these wisps of gold as his large flowing draperies to these half-clinging folds, as his powerful masses of limbs to these shadows of human form.

But this is not the whole of Botticelli's vision even in this one picture. If it were, he would be but a painter of small and dainty figures, as it were a moulder of Tanagra figurines born in a period of greater grace and more pleasing affectation. Botticelli's dreams are not a mere efflorescence of nature, nothing more than the representation of one abstracted quality attached to just so much of reality as is necessary to make it intelligible. Below all his elaborated character Botticelli, at his best, has strength and simplicity. His roses in the *Birth of Venus* are, at bottom, real roses, not merely the scent of dropping petals ; his sea is a real sea, not merely a shadow of a ripple under the sky. In the same way his bodies are real bodies, of a type certainly, but yet strong and supple human figures.

## THE PAGAN WORLD

Mr. Horne criticises him for depicting with too great faithfulness in his men and women a somewhat ungainly and he Tuscan type. The heaviness of the stock is so far outbalanced by the delicacy of the attitude and of the limbs that the truth of the criticism is not at the first blush apparent; but the faithfulness which produces this fault springs from an appreciation of the strength, dignity, and vigour of the actual human body, and this appreciation it is which gives the figures their power. In the *Birth of Venus* these qualities appear in the whole body of Venus herself, in much of the attendant maiden, but chiefly in the two flying figures of the winds. Were the arms and legs of these two figures less strong and simple, less broadly sufficient, they would not produce so powerful an impression of real flight; their movement would be but a suggestion of intangibility and airiness and they would be wisps of driven cloud, not the spirits of the wind which are themselves strong to drive the clouds before them. So, too, were she not strong in herself and solid on her feet Venus would be too dainty and unsubstantial to form the centre even of this scene, and too much wanting in health and strength to embody in herself the true morning freshness, which is the spirit of the picture.

In other paintings the strength and simplicity of Botticelli are more apparent. In the *Spring* (Plate v.) there is too much vigour in the spirit of the wind and in the startled maiden whom he is touching before snatching her up to form with him the pair of flying figures in the *Birth of Venus*. They are too solid and vigorous,

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

these two figures, and their motion fails to be communicated to the other forms in the picture, as it succeeds in the *Birth of Venus*. But in the figures of the three Graces which make the true centre of the *Spring*, strength and simplicity and vigour are joined to exquisiteness and elegance in such a way that it is difficult to decide which is the dominant quality. These are not phantoms which sway in their dreamy dance under the green grove of trees and over the thick carpet of flowers, but strong human bodies whose limbs feel their own weight, and have the life within them to carry it and to bear it easily in all the perfect actions which spring from their own strength. The exquisite pattern of their limbs is not a mere decorator's device to please the eye with interlocking line, but the outcome of sweet sympathy of motion, the very essence of the dance. The arms and the shoulders, the necks and the legs are exquisite and slender, but exquisite with life and slender with sinuous strength. Such strength and life spring from breadth and simplicity, and at the bottom of all the beauty of this vision there lies a fund of elemental life. Exquisiteness, remoteness, and troubling charm may indeed be the first and the final note of this picture, as they are of the *Birth of Venus*, but here, even more than there, the real force of the picture lies in the marriage of this charm to a true human joy. As in that picture the sea and the fresh morning, so in this the deep grove with a distant view over hill and plain darkened by the action of time until the golden light of morning has become the half dusk of evening, have clothed them-

## THE PAGAN WORLD

selves in human or divine forms, and inspiring them with mystery and charm, have taken from them none of their strength or vitality.

Still more in certain lesser pictures Botticelli has shown that his charm is no denial of dignity and vigour. Is it too much of a paradox to say that Botticelli is a painter happier in his figures of men than in those of women? He tends in his women to become too thin and slender in the limbs and, in inevitable compensation, too clumsy in the body and very often in the drapery. Frequently his women have the air of being pregnant, and they are so explained in the picture of the *Spring* and in some representations of saints even by Mr. Horne, who gives his own testimony to the beauty of the condition. But in the Dante drawings the disembodied spirit of Beatrice has all these features, and this proves, if proof is wanted, that the idea of pregnancy is not the explanation of the particular form, but that it is due solely to the desire to give mass and weight to the draped figure, and thus to present a dignity and solidity which would otherwise be wanting in the body. In the figures of men, on the other hand, Botticelli found all the weight and strength he needed. Some of the portrait-heads show how well he could concentrate himself on the representation of power and force of character, and more than one picture proves that with him the nude male became an adequate embodiment of vigour and simplicity.

There is no better example of this than the *Mars and Venus* (Plate XII.) in the National Gallery. The strong

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

young god lies sleeping with his head thrown back and all his limbs relaxed. There is no delicacy about his sleeping, but the same sturdy health as he would show in all his waking actions, fighting, or hunting, or loving. The figure is taken from the life perhaps, but not roughly or ignorantly transported into painting. It is selected with full admiration of the greater qualities—dignity, majesty, strength. Thus the figure gives manhood to the little enigmatic scene of the picture. Venus, for all the charm of her face and the careful disposition of her easy robe, falls into the second place, because her attitude and her form are not definite, nor adequate, nor fully thought out. Mars makes the picture. The pleasant cherubs, the trees, and the plain stretch of landscape beyond contribute the decoration and give a comic air of gaiety to the precious scene, but Mars gives it its force, and saves it from being nothing more than a mere frolicsome vignette.

So great is the force of Botticelli's personal charm, and so powerful is the attraction of the fantastic eccentricity which belongs more to his age than to Botticelli himself, that the greater importance of his simplicity and dignity is largely overlooked. Were it not for these qualities, however, his conception of pagan beauty, at any rate, would be greatly lacking. Vivacity and troubling charm may be the sufficient and the proper accompaniments of the troubadour stories which gave subjects to such exquisite pieces of minor decoration as the panels painted after his design with the tale of *Nastagio*. They may also give very pleasing expression to a choice world of mediæval



## THE PAGAN WORLD

fairies who are masquerading for the occasion as the great living gods. But the great gods are not so easily moved to childish laughter and tears. It is not important that even the subjects of Botticelli's classical pictures are not intelligible, that the *Spring* is obscure, the *Mars* an enigma, the *Pallas* a heraldic device, and the *Calumny* requires an elaborate commentary for its explanation. But it would be important were Botticelli's representations, however full of charm, scanty in imagination, trivial in treatment, and failing entirely to be invested with the fullness of a larger life; were he only to see in antique poetry and art a detail here and there in flower or tree or ornament, and to devote tender care to just those features of face and shoulder, arm, knee, hand or foot which can readily be seized with the eye and rendered into verse or paint. This would not be enough to make the vision live. Others corrected the scantiness of their vision by the elaboration of their material detail, as they hid their bad drawing and ignorance of form under a mass of ornament. Botticelli, to his great credit, was not of these. The pictures in which he is at his best may be counted on the fingers of one hand, and far too often hardness, lumpiness, and excessive agitation are the faults which prevent him from attaining success. But when he is at his best, the gods and goddesses appear to him with much of their own grandeur and force as well as with the charm which was his own; and in such figures as those of the Graces or of Mars his simplicity becomes true dignity, and his apparent bareness of vision becomes ennobled by truly classic selection and restraint.



## CHAPTER III

### THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

SAVONAROLA'S bonfires, towards the end of Botticelli's lifetime, solved in a manner which is far more efficacious than any theoretic reasoning, the question of the limit between sacred and secular art. But for the greater part of his career Botticelli felt no scruples against mingling the profane with the religious, the material with the spiritual. Saint Sebastian was a martyr at the stake transfixed with the arrows of his executioners. To Botticelli as to almost all the Italian painters he was a nude youth, of superb and perfect form for the very reason that he was a saint, superior to pain and suffering for the very reason that he was a martyr. The youth standing so easily upon the fork of a tree in the picture at Berlin (Plate III.), with his square shoulders, well-poised head, light arms and stalwart legs, is Mercury in the *Spring*. When he is dead—if ever that strong smiling youth could die—his body will lie relaxed upon the earth as lightly as that of Holofernes in the picture in the Uffizi. The saint and the old general alike are clothed in the limbs of the gods with their eternal youth. Even Christ himself lying dead upon the knees of Mary, surrounded by the overpowering pathos of Botticelli's one truly dramatic picture—the *Pietà* of

## THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

Munich—has the strength and proportions of athletic youth, even the beardless head of Mars. Perhaps the execution of this picture is not Botticelli's, but the forms are his, and his is the spirit which sees in the tragedy the death of youth and the loss of splendid life. There is no religion in the Savonarolan sense in this identification of the Christian with the Pagan which merges the weeping over Christ into the lamentation for Adonis, but there is religion in the earlier sense, when beauty and nobility, whencesoever derived, were attributes of the Divine, and all that the imagination could give of splendour or of pathos was poured into the one channel of the living story of the Scriptures.

It was this spirit which brought to Botticelli the story of Judith (Plate 1.) in the same fantastic dreamlike form as that worn by Venus in her *Birth*. Old Testament and Pagan story, both found their shape alike in a world of quaint elegance and blithe freshness which was not that of Hebrew myth or Greek antiquity nor yet that of contemporary Florence. Judith, indeed, as Mr. Horne points out, carries the palm-branch of Florentine heralds. But she is no Florentine. With her waving dress, her dancing step, and her serene but wayward face, she is the careless heroine of a half-realised story, an externalised poetic idea which is the poet's creation and belongs neither to her lifetime nor to his. It matters little that neither she nor her quaint wide-stepping attendant is the invention of Botticelli's own imagination. Salome and the bearer at the birth of the Virgin had taken with other painters the forms of these

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

two figures ; Botticelli saw them once again, and saw them with his own eyes, when he was called upon to paint the Bible heroine. A fair maiden steps lightly in the triumph of her daring act ; her handmaid strides grimly behind her bearing the burden. The birds are singing as the knights in armour ride away and the breeze coils the drapery around the advancing forms. A land of half-mediæval chanson where Spring is eternal and youth gilds horrors, unconscious of the neighbourhood of evil, not Palestine in the days of wars nor Florence with its strife and luxury, is the dream country in which the young Botticelli placed Hebrew and Greek alike, the paradise of old time and newly discovered beauty in which the heroes of his religion lived and walked.

Again, in his earlier Adorations Religion in the sense of his later work is absent. In both the London pictures a romantic familiarity is the keynote of the great scene. The Magi and their gaily coloured retinues come crowding before the heavenly babe like the characters of some folk fairy-tale, in which the strange and wonderful is mingled throughout with the homely. The spirit which accepts without surprise giants and ogres, talking horses and vanishing mountains, is the spirit which inspires these pictures. Everything is done which could be construed into romantic wonder, rocks are contorted, rich dresses are contrived, strange antique ruins form the background, kings fall on their knees, and vast moving crowds are intended to be indicated. Yet everything remains congenial and intimate, nothing rises to the sublime, nothing awes

## THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

or seems stupendous. As Venus at her birth has simplicity and remoteness, so the Virgin and the Child are familiar and strange. Their want of consciousness and emphasis gives them a charm, but leaves them quite empty and inadequate representations of their true significance.

In the Adorations of a slightly later date the central figures become even more unimportant. The childish marvel of the earlier time—a legacy from Filippo Lippi to so marked a degree that the pictures were, until this year, labelled with the name of Filippo's son—becomes a more adult and full-blooded splendour as of contemporary life. The elements remain the same, but the treatment is grander and more impressive. But the pictures become naturalistic rather than fantastic; they do not for that reason become religious. There is great devotion on some of the faces, much proud humility in certain of the attitudes, and dignity and nobility in the characters, but the whole scene is one of pomp, and it is full of details which are of interest only in themselves and detract from, rather than express, the true meaning of the subject. Such approximation to religious feeling as the earlier pictures contained through their intimacy and simplicity is lost in a greater interest in the representation of handsome men.

To understand these pictures with their portraits and their contemporary airs it is necessary to realise that the Adoration of the Magi was one of the most popular subjects of religious processions during the fifteenth century. It was not only in pictures that the great men of the day were represented as the Kings or Magi, not merely as a

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

compliment to patrons that the painters gave their features to the principal actors of these scenes. Actually, in the flesh, the Medici rode at the heads of processions from their castles to some sacred spot, in mimicry—half pious, half ostentatious—of the scene of the Nativity. Recorded processions seem to have definitely occasioned some of the best known Adorations, and they have more than a faint echo in the pomp and ceremony, the elaborate and, to say it simply, theatrical grouping and postures of these pictures by Botticelli. Because the pageantry was whole-hearted and simple-minded, the character of the figures is not theatrical in the bad modern sense of the term, but because it is self-conscious and of a ritual character it remains theatrical. They are children dressed up and believing in their parts, and therefore they are pleasing and to some extent convincing; they are not imagined as the real persons of the incident, and therefore they are not religious. Most clearly of all is this to be seen in the figures of the Holy Family which should represent the central incident of the story. Placed in the background, they are not the central and emphatic part of a real scene, but they are like painted images, the objects of a ritual worship, the symbols of a cult, and not the inspiring force of a spontaneous action.

Not till a still later picture, anterior itself to his conversion, did Botticelli attempt to embody in an Adoration a powerful and constraining motive. In the panel in the Uffizi, which is but a sketch coloured by a later hand, details and individual actions are swamped in a great move-

## THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

ment which represents the Universe surging in ecstasy to the birthplace of its Saviour. The beginnings of a new art are in this picture, and the seeds of a new spirit. But even so the representation is not complete. Vehemence had taken the place of bold and dignified naturalism, as that had itself taken the place of homely romance, but vehemence is represented for its own sake, as in all Botticelli's creations of this period; it is not marked with any special spiritual force of the crowds around the manger. Even here the central figures are petty and inadequate; the imagination of the incident does not start from and become penetrated by their significance. The crowd forms the picture, and the religious keynote must be supplied by the spectator who knows why the crowds are thus agitated; for the painter has not had the force to make explicit, even to suggest, pictorially the meaning of the scene.

Where, then, does Religion enter into Botticelli's pictures? Not, certainly, in his hard and gaunt saints and bishops who stand beneath the Coronation of the Virgin, or fill the spandrels of the Sistine Chapel, or surround the Madonna as she sits enthroned. Nor yet in the large ungainly 'machines' which do duty for religious histories upon the walls of the Sistine Chapel. Here certainly he makes an attempt to be magnificent and awe-inspiring. He endeavours to be definite and to mark strong character; his virility leads him to exaggerate hard outlines and to imagine heroic poses. His saints and doctors, as a result, are bogeys which would frighten children. Only St. Augustine in the little picture in the Uffizi and in the charming

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

predella in the Academy (Plate x.) is a cheery, good-humoured old plebeian with a round face, a round nose, and an embracing smile. But even St. Augustine, if indeed it be he, becomes, in the fresco on the wall of the Ognissanti (Plate iv.), the big-handed, large-boned man of action, austere in look and sudden in his movements, in whom Botticelli found his type of spiritual manhood. Here he has a rapt intensity of ecstasy which seemed to Vasari a masterstroke of religious fervidity. *A Last Communion of St. Jerome* is much less known, but it was copied several times and may have attained a popularity which it deserved, for it has a restraint in feeling and in execution which marks it as superior to all other examples of Botticelli's religious pathos. Elsewhere his vehemence of expression becomes too tragically riotous, and in such scenes from the lives of the saints as the four panels of San Zenobio, contorted agitation takes the place of dignity, and the effort for significance becomes so exaggerated and ugly that it detracts even from the impression of horror which it should convey.

Botticelli has two main types of the Madonna, one of which may be associated with these vehement representations of religious fervour. Whenever the Signs of the Passion are carried by the attendant angels—sometimes when these symbols of his meaning are absent,—the wistful or downcast gaze of his Virgins becomes the piteous weeping of the prophetic mother, and the lips, delicately turned elsewhere, are contracted at the corners of the mouth in unrestrained anguish. This type, with a head of Christ,



## THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

which is almost a primitive mask of piteousness or agony, is the most characteristic of his later period, and exists in pictures which suggest the hands of pupils rather than the work of the master. The more generally characteristic version is less extreme in its delineation of one passion and more full of various character.

In the earliest pictures the head of the Madonna is almost colourless and conventional, the type of tenderness and sweetness which Botticelli inherited from the monastic tradition through Filippo Lippi, and to which his pupil Filippino Lippi gave a more unquestioning adherence. Gradually, however, the type assumes more personal character, becomes more thoughtful and more sensitive, more delicate, languorous, and weary, more troubled with the mystery of an uncomprehended fate, until, in its complete form, it emerges as precisely that of Venus. This identification of the two types should cause no surprise; it has nothing in it which is peculiar to Botticelli. To all the painters of the period the Virgin appeared as the Incarnation of all human beauty. It would have argued lack of religion to withhold from her any element of beauty which could be thought to increase her glory. Hence she was endowed with all the graces of the heathen goddess. On the other hand, it would have savoured of sin against beauty to withhold from Venus any of the perfections of form and feature which seemed fair upon the face of the Madonna. Therefore the two types must coincide. No irreligion is the cause of this, but excess and all-pervadingness of one emotion, religious and æsthetic at once, undivided itself



## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

and unconscious of any division between the beauties appropriate to different ideas.

When the same man gave to either figure the whole of his conception of female beauty, the types were bound to coincide. Botticelli's, however, whether in Madonna or in Venus, has for the present generation a note which is pre-eminently religious. But it is impossible to determine precisely in which quality this note consists. The air of amazed mystery, the suggestion of greater knowledge, the hint of languid suffering which are marks of Botticelli's types are all part of the network of charm which makes his Madonnas appear the true image of religion. But as soon as they are divided off and made emphatic, they gain a character of their own which has no claim to be regarded as pre-eminently religious, and they become some of the many ideals which may be equalled, or, if you will, surpassed by others. Mystery, the only one of the ideals which is by its own nature an attribute of the divine, is not confined to any particular type of beauty, but is the concomitant of charm, the element essential to all beauty. A conscious air of mystification—so far from being in Botticelli a mark of superlative religious vision—is the link which binds him—not only in spirit but in the actual methods of facial distortion and exaggeration by which he produces it—to the most distant pole of art, the art of Greuze.

The acts of the Madonna bring before us more articulately than do her features the suggestion of religion. Her peaceful maternity in the majority of his pictures, her

## THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

acts of sweet and tender solicitude to the Babe whom she has borne, these are religious in that they are part of a universal human emotion which must, from its universality and its inestimable value, form great part of every religion. It is the glory of the European Renaissance in art that it perfected in a thousand varieties the universal ideal of the Mother and Child. But Botticelli is but one of many in the art of this representation, less varied, less inventive, less perfect in his selection, less happy even in his delineation of the Child than many others. He has no single and completely memorable example of the Mother holding her Infant to compare either with some of Raphael's or with the sculptured Florentine monuments which inspired both Raphael and himself. The memory does not select the relation of the Mother to the Child as the dominant feature of the picture; the mind passes at once either to some characteristic of the surrounding group or to the features of the Madonna herself. Even in the *Magnificat* (Plate VII.), which is the happiest in idea, the thought flies to the crowning angel on the right; or in the *Pomegranate* (Plate XVIII.) to the face of the Madonna; while in the most popular of all the pictures of the workshop, the National Gallery *tondo* (Plate XXIII.), the very remoteness of the Madonna from the Child appears to be the feature which causes the picture to be the most endearing.

Fault has been found with the *Annunciation* in the Uffizi (Plate XIX.), not only with the colour and the execution, but also with what is asserted to be the vulgarity and commonness of its poses. Certainly the colour and the

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

execution suggest that Botticelli scarcely troubled to touch the painting of this panel, but with the shortcomings in the technique the faults of the picture are exhausted. The Annunciation, or the conception of a heavenly message, is, like the conception of innocent Maternity, one of the triumphant achievements of Italian Art. Botticelli's variation upon the theme is more successful than his treatment of the Madonna and Child. The kneeling angel is at once humble and commanding; the Madonna, living and modest, deprecates and yet deserves her dignity. The commonness of the types is but an aspect of the humanity of the vision; the conception is not lowered by the naturalism of the forms. The picture has neither the haunting subtlety nor yet the exquisite line of earlier Sienese representations, but it has, as they have not, a breadth, tangibility and force of expression which bring the scene from decorative dreamland into the world of living action. There is still greater force and dignity in the Angel Gabriel which Botticelli painted with his own hand in fresco for the Monks of San Martino, and though the Madonna has been entirely overlaid with repainting and the whole wall has suffered, the remains of the fresco contain an even greater suggestion of poetry, through the great distance of colonnade down which the message echoes.

Without his angels Botticelli would have failed of the greater part of his religious message. No character given to the central figures of the story could express so well the many emotions of the Christian mind. Purely imaginary forms are needed, figures endowed with superhuman

## THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

powers, to embody the emotions which are the foundation of his pictures. In the illustrations to Dante his imagination, strangely enough, fails to give more than a modest terror and variety to the conventional devils of his *Inferno*. He is far too much occupied with the careful patterning of his space, and with studiously incorporating all the features of the canto which he is illustrating—he is possibly even trusting too much to the terrific ensemble of his repeated horrors, to devise forms which in themselves convey the horrors which he is describing. In the *Purgatory* his design grows lighter, and some among the scattered and unfinished figures are delightfully symbolic of the happiness which they are shortly to deserve. But at the end of the *Purgatory* he breaks forth into an outburst of figures which are the triumphant heralds of eternal joy, and in the *Paradise*, with some clumsiness and awkwardness, he carries his two figures of Dante and Beatrice through every expression of superhuman and soaring bliss. One page alone, that of Dante and Beatrice passing above the trees, is among the greatest triumphs of expression which pictorial art has devised.

This imagination of disembodied forms for the representation of the emotions is the central note of the angel choirs which Botticelli placed in most of his pictures of the Madonna. They are an imaginary chorus telling the tale which the principal figures illustrate; as notes of music emphasise the action of the story, they express with their limbs, their faces, their drapery, and their movements the feeling of the painter before the scene depicted.

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

They are the picture itself, while the principal figures are mainly portraits, documents, descriptions. Such are the angels in the *Coronation* from the Church of San Marco which is now in the Florence Academy. Here they are somewhat solid, but they dance lightly in their double circles, and with their blithe ascending flight they suggest both the altitude of the heavens and the harmonious happiness of its dwellers. The gravity in the figure of the Deity and the humility in the somewhat awkward stooping position of the Madonna are enough, perhaps, to retain the charm of the conventional and hackneyed group, but by no means enough to counterbalance the pompous, heavy and exaggerated figures of the four saints and doctors below. The choir of angels is more than needed in order to bring the picture together—it is almost the one touch which makes it into a picture at all.

In one form or another the angels reappear in almost all Botticelli's paintings of the Madonna. Now they enter as the two angels who draw aside the curtains which reveal the Mother and Child, as in the San Barnaba altarpiece (Plate ix.), or the little picture at the Ambrosiana (Plate xx.). These are almost purely accessory figures, unnecessary for the literal representation of the idea, and frigid in the literal translation of their action. The mere notion that the Madonna should be hidden by a curtain and suddenly uncovered to the stare of the beholder, is theatrical, idolatrous, and offensive. Moreover, in the charming but carelessly devised and executed painting in the Ambrosiana the curtain could never have come

## THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

between the Madonna and the spectator, and therefore its removal is supererogatory. But the figures are justified in the total scheme by their contribution to the emotional effect. Details in a composition which is generally wanting in unity, they convey through the character of their own part the spirit which should be, perhaps is, expressed by the whole.

At other times the attendant angels perform less vigorously, but enter more grandly into the total scheme. The Madonnas of the *Magnificat* or of the *Pomegranate* depend greatly for their effect upon the studied faces and attitudes of their attendants. It is wise not to exaggerate their religious intention, remembering the story told by Vasari of one of the pictures copied in the studio of Botticelli. It had in it eight angels, equal in number to the chief magistrates of Florence. When the pupil was to bring his patron to see the work, Botticelli painted on the head of each of the figures the red cap which marked the judge. The boy was horrified at the transformation, thinking, because Botticelli himself, the patron, and all the bystanders pretended not to see the caps, that he had lost his senses. But though this story shows that the deep significance of the painting was not held in overmuch honour by the Academy of Idlers whose leader had created it, it does not follow that somewhere underneath the laughing face there is not a depth of feeling and real emotion. Botticelli may have laughed in his sleeve at the attribution by his patrons of deep meanings to figures which to his own eyes were merely expressions of a sense of

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

beauty—he would certainly have laughed outright at the elaborate analyses of modern admirers—but the deep feelings were there, nevertheless, and they controlled the conception of beauty. They governed his choice, among contemporary types, of precisely these sensitive and brooding faces of youths, and his employment of them for the expression of religious emotions. Waywardness, passion, pride, nobility of idea, force of will, and impatience in execution are marks of their relation to the Divine—a complication of character which called forth no sympathy for many centuries, and has waited until the present before it could appeal as an expression of religion.

The attitudes of the angels in these pictures are no less significant than their features. The swaying dance of the *Coronation* becomes, in the *Virgin of the Pomegranate*, a fraction of an adoring circle. Stilled by the immediate nearness of the Virgin and the Child, the angels move more gravely, but their strong young bodies bend in the movement of their adoration, and their young faces are lit up with the glory of their inward thoughts.

Finally, when religion became in its fanatic form the sole and only purpose of the picture, in the *Nativity* in London (Plate XXI.), the angels, with their setting of light, become quite the paramount incident in the picture. Botticelli is not painting here the history of the Nativity as it once took place. The inscription tells us that he is painting with prophetic vision the Second Coming, which, as a follower of Savonarola, he actually believed to be near at hand. Save that the figures in the manger



## THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

have become larger and more prominent than they were in earlier Adorations, they vary little from conventional representations. Perhaps already by this date, certainly in Botticelli's mind, there would have been something of sacrilege and much loss of religious force in altering a presentation which had become hallowed by much usage. But in the imaginary figures there was scope for worlds of emotional imagination. Angels surround the Magi and the shepherds, and dominate their action with their visible inspiration. Angels embrace in their joy the three blessed souls at the foot of the picture. Angels watch and sing upon the golden thatch of the manger. Above, full in the light of the dawning sun, eclipsing its rays with their own brilliance, the angels swirl in a light ecstatic dance of flight, waving their palm branches and their hanging crowns as they circle hand in hand. The golden rays which fall from them tinge the dark trees with light, gild the thatched roof, and pass beyond upon the nearer figures. With this light descends their joy and their ecstasy of movement, until the whole scene becomes a chiming echo of the melody to which their limbs are moving.

This is Botticelli's latest style—the most characteristic and the most religious. Like a page of his Dante illustrations, the *Nativity* presents, in a crowd of figures and a somewhat distorted composition, a penetrating, all-pervading effort towards heaping up in masses of emotional imagery the effect and inspiration of one dominating thought. His last certain picture has for its central emo-



## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

tion a superhuman joy; and in joy the spirit of Botticelli showed itself at its best. Where the spirit is one of agony or trouble, his vehemence and distortion are unrelieved, but never, even when at their most joyous, are Botticelli's pictures so thoroughly conceived in happiness that there is not within them a sense of underlying conflict. In this lies the secret of his appeal to the modern spirit; for while he dwells on the elements of beauty, striving to snatch from them all the joy that they contain, around and among and above these details of happiness there rests the presence of persistent, inevitable pain.

## CHAPTER IV

### BOTTICELLI AS PAINTER

SO far Botticelli's work has been regarded almost entirely from the point of view of its interpretation as an effort of imagination. To a certain extent this point of view fails to do justice to him as a painter. The imagination that can be interpreted in words might take the forms of poetry, perhaps even of music, equally well as those of painting. Yet it forms the first element in the painter's mind. The second element, Observation, with its concomitant, Representation, can also, to some extent, be regarded as common to the different arts. It is with the third, Decoration, that the painter has exclusively to deal; for though each of the other arts has its own features of decoration, and these can be compared with each other, their means of attraction and their powers of expression are bounded by the limits of the particular art. The attempt made by some modern writers to attribute to his decorative element the whole of Botticelli's value and attraction is one-sided and misleading. But if it be clearly understood that each of the three elements—Imagination, Observation, and Decoration—must be inseparably present in any complete work of art, and that the analysis of each one of them necessarily touches

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

upon and involves the others, the best way to approach a painter's work may well be through his decorative side.

The full effect of Botticelli's decorative work, like that of most of his contemporaries, is lost. For Botticelli this is even a greater loss than in the case of most other painters, since, from what is known of his original output, the purely decorative character of his commissions was proportionately large. His little, long pictures and those of his school, the stories of San Zenobio, Virginia, Lucretia—even the *Calumny* and the *Mars and Venus* were intended to form part of wooden furniture. Their setting is lost; in their frames on the walls of galleries much is obscured, and much more is brought into too great prominence. His frescoes in the Sistine Chapel fail in their effect through the remodelling of the building. The *Venus* has lost its setting, and the *Spring* not only has been shorn of its golden lights, but is placed in the Academy on a wall beside two altar-pieces of Filippo Lippi, which are thoroughly out of keeping with it in colour, in size, and in feeling. To see the picture it is necessary to stand in the next room, and to frame it as far as possible by the open door. The Dante drawings are unfinished, and bereft of both the spontaneity of the original line and the colour which was the reason of the rigid outline. The frescoes of Lorenzo's villa, the Spedaletto, are destroyed. Those of the Tornabuoni villa remain only in fragments.

Yet as the Tornabuoni frescoes are the most purely

## BOTTICELLI AS PAINTER

decorative of his remaining works, they form the most fitting approach for those who wish to learn his manner. Time has dealt kindly with their colour, reducing to pale blues and greens the once brilliant and clear tints, and making even the strong brown of Giovanna's dress distant and vanishing. A uniform mist of toned plaster has replaced the unity of coloured light. In certain other pictures which are still in their original condition, Botticelli's colour can be judged with greater trustworthiness. Clear and cool tints, transparent and equable, mark the *Birth of Venus*, the larger *Madonnas*, or the *Mars*. Elsewhere, when the picture was smaller, Botticelli becomes richer and hotter, using strong blues, browns, reds and yellows in bold juxtaposition. In the *Calumny* or the *Adoration* of the Uffizi, his colour is at its best. Here the strong and rich tints are massed together and set off against powerful browns and dark navy greens. But, throughout, the strong colour is clear and brilliant, never clashing or violent, and everywhere it is harmonious with the lustre of jewels and gold. Gold runs through his tints as a thread in Flemish tapestry, bringing light into the dark places and richness into the lighter colours. There is gold in his draperies and in his hair, in the jewels or in the leaves of trees, and it is the gold which draws all the harmonies together in a restrained glory of imagined day.

The decorative effect of the fresco of Giovanna Tornabuoni is produced by the balance and contrast of the two halves of the painted space. In one half there is

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

the single, simple and severe figure of Giovanna. She is given emphasis by her isolation and dignity, and by her severity of colour and line. In the other half there is a comparatively complicated group of drapery, faces, limbs, movements, lines, and colours. The whole makes up a loosely balanced design which more or less adequately fills the space; one mass answers to the other without formality and without repetition. To those who consider that a decoration for a wall should retain the flatness of the surface on which it is painted, this balance of groups is sufficient virtue for the fresco. But in praising it for this reason they forget that even here Botticelli deliberately attempted to destroy this flatness and to give the fresco a space and depth of its own by inventing and emphasising a figure of a child in the foreground. In the second fresco, that of Lorenzo Tornabuoni, the effort to produce an effect of space is very evident in the grouping of the Sciences, and with the greater feeling of space there comes naturally a further breaking up of the grouping and a more varied disposition of the figures.

These two tendencies are constantly observable in Botticelli's work: the one towards a loose balance of somewhat isolated masses, the other towards a definite patterning of the space which has to be filled. With the second comes, naturally but not by any means necessarily, a study of the illusory spatial relations between the figures. In the large decorative pictures, the *Spring*, the *Birth of Venus*, and to some extent in the *Pallas*, the figures are almost isolated and laid on like separate superficial ornaments. It is only

## BOTTICELLI AS PAINTER

with considerable effort that the different groups within the *Spring* are brought into a connection of line and space and movement, although when once the connection has been seen, it is easy for the observer to discover an exquisite beauty and subtlety in the slight means of connection, and the more the relation is invisible to the ordinary observer the more credit for discernment accrues to the discoverer of the subtlety. This isolation of the separate groups is perfectly compatible with the most careful and choice patterning in the details. Nothing could be more exquisitely rhythmical and inter-related than every part of the group of the Three Graces in this picture; nor could more melodious outlines be conceived than those of the Venus in the *Birth* or of Flora in the *Spring*.

In other pictures this careful patterning runs throughout the design. The most striking example of this is the *Venus and Mars* in London. Here every detail of mass is studied for its proportion with the other masses; every line runs into another line, balances, contrasts, emphasises and completes the rest. Look, for instance, at the red robe upon which Mars is lying. With his toe he catches a corner of the fabric, stretching it out along the whole length of his leg, and thus securing a dark and coloured background for his flesh and a rigid line to emphasise the curve of his limbs. In the same way the simple and, in a sense, plain background of sea or plain in this picture, or more clearly in the *Calumny*, are the necessary (if artificial) complements to Botticelli's figures. Where he needs it he can pour out an exuberant store of flowers and foliage for

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

his personages to revel in; but his figures at their best are themselves so strong that stiff trees, or a line of sea or rigid foliage, forms their most fitting setting. The same effect of a simple deliberate pattern may be seen in the figure of Giovanna Tornabuoni in the Louvre fresco, or, as has been said, in the figures of the Three Graces in the *Spring*. But still more evident is it in the portrait wrongly named *La Bella Simonetta* (Plate xiv.), in the Pitti Gallery. Here again there is a careful, restrained line, sober but dignified colour, and a deliberate and exquisite pattern, with a background so hard and dull as to be a mere setting for the beauties in front of it. These are the characteristics of Botticelli in his best and highest mood, and so far from the practice of any of his pupils or contemporaries that, in spite of the flatness of the face and figure, no other name but the traditional one of Botticelli can rest as fitting to the picture.

Such a restrained and thorough patterning in line and mass and colour is the natural concomitant of Botticelli's most careful and vigorous drawing. Careful disposition of line follows upon the definite seizing of the attitude and the true representation of character. Rhythm is here, as it is in music, stress upon the dominant and emphatic notes. The whole figure is caught and represented in one characteristic moment, and the unity of intention finds its expression in a carefully balanced and interlocked unity of design. The tenseness and concentration of the vision show themselves at once in the definite contour of the figure represented, and in the absence of



## BOTTICELLI AS PAINTER

all extravagance and irrelevance in the pattern which the contours make within the frame.

In the representation of the human figure, but still more in that of a group, something more than linear pattern and balance of masses is required. To produce a single concentrated effect the space needed for the movements of the figures must be single, and it must be as homogeneous as their lines. The second of the Louvre frescoes, that of Lorenzo Tornabuoni, shows, as has been said, that a consistent arrangement in three dimensions was at one time a tendency of Botticelli's work. In the early picture of Holofernes there is something on a small scale of the grand imagination of space which best befits a large mural picture. The figure of a man bending over his sword is not only an exercise in foreshortening, but also, like similar but more pronounced figures in Luca Signorelli's work, the keynote of the space within the frame. Still more evident is the effort in the Sistine frescoes, though there the effect is not sustained. In the *Madonna of the Pomegranate* the angels recede and throw the Madonna into spatial emphasis as well as find her a place in the pattern, which is all that she is given by them in the *Madonna of the Magnificat*. But once above all, in the pictures of the Adoration, Botticelli succeeds in joining together spatial effects with consistent design in one concentrated scheme. In the *Adoration* of the Uffizi his achievement is far beyond that of his contemporaries. Here, besides colour, he attains his utmost dignity of form, and finds a setting which is, upon the



## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

whole, entirely satisfactory both to the imagination and the eye.

In this picture, it will be remembered, pomp and procession are the dominating notes. Singleness of purpose and unity of scene are the natural and the necessary artistic and decorative counterparts of such ideas. The effect is of a *coup de théâtre*, a set-piece of momentary display. In the earlier *Adorations* the simpler fairy-tale atmosphere demanded no such unity. There the fancy wanders on from one end of the picture to the other, entertained, interested, amused, and fascinated by each successive detail in the pleasant array. The same want of concentrated unity belongs to the conception of classical or allegorical scenes such as the *Birth of Venus* or the *Spring*. The total effect is an accumulation of details. No single moment is chosen to display the whole. The idea is meandering and discursive; the merest thread of connection is sufficient. It is Botticelli's merit, and a promise of better things in art, that the discursive element which was common to him and to his period was counteracted by a greater seriousness of purpose than was possessed by most of his contemporary Florentines. Otherwise such playful exuberance of line as is visible in the fresco of Giovanna Tornabuoni or the drawing of *Abundance* (British Museum) would have led to the elaboration of petty detail which is to be seen, for example, in Filippino's later work; and Botticelli would have ended like some of his imitators in a flourish of delicate and fanciful scroll-work, as mannered as it is meaningless.

## BOTTICELLI AS PAINTER

But the element which saved Botticelli and led him to produce the finest and most dignified of his works itself led to his disaster. Intentness on significance above mere decoration brought him to turn prettiness into dignity, discursiveness into concentration, but it caused him in the end to sacrifice both. It has been the fashion to regard Botticelli as the most purely decorative and the least representative of Florentine painters. Nothing could be further from the truth. In everything that is not purely conventional Botticelli is significant. His line is not meaningless decoration but pregnant description; his pattern not mere toying with lines but expression of action and community of action. Such expressiveness, had it been alone, might have been successful in combating the initial tendency to discursiveness. But the intentness of character which such a love for significance expresses is but one aspect of Botticelli's dominant characteristic, vehemence. The excess of vehemence is over-significance, and as such this quality ceased to combat the enemy discursiveness and only reinforced it. Botticelli was saved from mere prettiness by his desire to be significant; through his over-significance he ceased even to be pretty.

In one picture, indeed, Botticelli succeeded in combining vehemence of action and feeling with concentration of design. That picture is the *Lamentation over Christ* at Munich. It, and the kindred but less poignant *Pentecost* belonging to Sir Frederick Cook at Richmond, are passed over too readily by writers on Botticelli who fail to recognise under their ugliness of colour, exaggeration



## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

of attitude, and distortion of form the supreme effort of the painter in the direction which lay nearest to his heart.

It is quite possible that the modern revolt against proportion, moderation, and restraint in the depiction of the emotions will lead to a revised estimate of these works, and cause them to be accepted not only as entirely by Botticelli himself but also as a proof of his greater merit. Certainly in this and in other pictures, mainly Madonnas of the pathetic type, Botticelli, or the workers in his studio, made use of the simplest means to portray only what was absolutely essential in order to convey their emotions, and they rejected everything which, attractive in itself, fails to heighten the main intention. Hitherto mere inferiority of execution, carelessness, and want of the sense of quality have been accepted as the reason of these pictures; and these had undoubtedly a part in the effect. But such reasons are not necessarily productive of bad art, and it may well be that just as the necessities of cheap engraving may produce work which is more effective and true to type than is the result of luxuries of opportunity, so the commoner forms of painting may have in this case led to the emergence of beauties and justnesses which more careful work and the demands of a more restrained and well-balanced public would only have obscured.

However that may be, the *Lamentation* stands alone and supreme among Botticelli's subject-pictures for its combination of dramatic concentration and design. In the majority of his other pictures, from the Sistine frescoes

## BOTTICELLI AS PAINTER

to the panels of San Zenobio, though he may contrive single figures which are equally poignant and tragic, he produces his effect of vehemence, not by conceiving one moment which will give a supreme and single impression, but by crowding into his space all the moving incidents of a series of events; not by concentrating his power into single and impressive figures, but by dissipating his movement over the distortions of a multitude. Mr. Horne says well of the illustrations to the *Inferno* of Dante that they are commentaries, not illustrations in the modern sense. Botticelli attempts to unite in a single space every scene which is described in the chosen canto. Dante and Virgil appear over and over again on the same sheet; the various scenes which they observe at the different stages of their adventure are displayed side by side with equal emphasis. The skill required is that of uniting into one decorative pattern the different incidents. This Botticelli contrives with great success in the illustrations. In the pictures he fails. Even in the *Calumny*, where only one scene is depicted, the figures fall into scattered groups; the drama of the scene is lost in the commentary. This is already the case in the Sistine frescoes, where the failure is emphasised by the definite effort for a spatial composition. The painter sets detached masses of good drawing and telling incident into the foreground; but the real incidents dot themselves in varying planes above, around and behind the emphasised figures. Virginia, Lucretia, San Zenobio, all of these have their stories told in scattered detail. In vain are connecting figures introduced between the groups. In vain does

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

a single architectural frame, or a single landscape, stretch itself over or behind the figure in an attempt to bring them into one whole. The details are not seen together as one drama, nor set within a single space. All unity and all effect is lost except that, which is literary and not artistic, of the cumulated interest of successive incidents. Worse still, since the emotion fails to weld the whole into one concentrated vision, it finds expression in the excessive agitation of each single figure. The whole design fails to embody or express its intention; each figure, therefore, must attempt by the exaggeration of its part to produce the required effect.

No excuse of renunciation which can account for the absence of all accessory beauty of colour or detail in the *Lamentation* can palliate these failures in delineation and in design. Botticelli had shown in many works of his prime, could show still in such works as his *Nativity*, that he was capable of conceiving and executing works of nobility, dignity, concentration, and simplicity. In his happier pictures, Madonnas or mythological subjects, still more in the illustrations to the *Purgatory* and the *Paradise*, he could unify with the radiance of his bliss form, feature, landscape, attitude, and accessory. Maybe happiness tends to unify, tragedy to dis sever; comedy or ecstasy needs less rigorous unity of form than tragedy to produce its effect. But there is another and nearer reason why Botticelli fails to succeed in just the direction in which he attempted the most; why his concentration and his vehemence failed, except once in the *Lamentation*, to combine and make

## BOTTICELLI AS PAINTER

him truly dramatic. His means were inadequate to execute the vehemence of his ideas ; his impatience and want of persistence prevented him from discovering the methods in which alone he could have given himself expression. He was a modern of his day in spirit, but he was out of date, almost a reactionary in his methods.

Line and flat colour, a simple conception of space and a sheer uniformity of atmosphere, these were the means of expression which were at Botticelli's disposal. Form to him was outline, colour was the tinting of flat spaces, and space and atmosphere were rudimentary conventions for rendering comparative nearness and farness of figures and objects. With these he attempted to portray vehement motion and violent actions. The task was impossible. The line which expresses vehemence is broken and dashing, merely suggestive and never representative. It suggests motion ; it does not display the figure in motion. The line of motion in painting is elusive and vague, not the strong contour of the sculptor. But Botticelli was born to a rigid outline which defined the whole contour, showed structure, and encased the form in a solid frame. Admirable as a medium for the display of the figure at rest, or of nobility and strength of concentrated vigour, this medium fails utterly to convey agitation and vehemence. It is a contradiction of all visual laws to attempt to combine a rapid movement with a rigid frame. Hence attitudes which might have escaped all appearance of exaggeration had they been merely suggested, become frozen distortion when joined to full representation ; and, worse still, in order

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

to give even a semblance of vehemence to these rigidly defined figures, they have to be contorted and flung about in exaggerations beyond the possibility of the frame. Thus in all Botticelli's later work every moving figure is bent forward from the hips in order to appear to move at all; arms, legs, draperies are flung around, and faces become mere masks, all signals of distress with not a trace of humanity to join them together.

Worse even follows from the lack of space and atmosphere and from the flatness of the colour. In order to express vehemence of scene without contradicting the effect by hardness, the painter needs fluid outlines, dissolving colour, depth of space, and finally contrasts of light and shade. The whole apparatus of later Italian art was needed in order that Botticelli might carry out his conceptions. But though he conceived, he made no effort whatever to execute. While he was trying in vain to adapt his ideas to the old methods, men were working around him busily in new directions and helping to find the secrets which he required. Leonardo above all was searching out the means to render possible in painting the representation of the emotions which Botticelli felt and was dumb to convey. The disappearing outline which conveys motion without contradicting it, and brings a new beauty into painting from the effects of light, was the discovery of Leonardo, the beginning of modern art. Chiaroscuro came later, though it too followed from Leonardo's example. Depth of space and atmosphere, with the unity which they contrive to introduce into sub-



## BOTTICELLI AS PAINTER

ject pictures, were the results of Leonardo's study. All were brought forth in the great cartoon for the Signoria which, strange as it seems, was uncovered years before Botticelli died. At the same date Michelangelo showed his cartoon of the *Bathing Soldiers*, in which the final and determining form was given to strong sculptural modelling of the human figure. Botticelli had advanced also in this direction, but his desire for vehemence had caused him, when he was nearer to the goal, to desist from the attempt.

So far from joining in the new movement, Botticelli appears even to have made retrograde steps. Unable to advance, he turned back and became archaistic.

As early as the fresco of Lorenzo Tornabuoni he gives a suggestion of reactionary feeling. The seven Sciences appear to many as being by another hand, and were it not that their features reappear in the Dante illustrations, the suggestion of a divided authorship would have some plausibility. But their difference from the ordinary style of Botticelli is to be accounted for on other grounds. These figures were traditional and had found their form in the art of a previous century. In designing them Botticelli turned to their conventional representations, not probably through laziness, for the forms chosen were not those of the conventional art of the day, but through the belief that the forms hallowed by time possessed some magic and appropriateness which no new invention could equal. This is the true archaistic feeling, and it is no surprise to find it expressed in the work of Botticelli, whose mind



## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

from the first showed a literary tinge. The same spirit expresses itself in the drawings for the *Inferno* of Dante, in which the conventional and old-fashioned routine of commentary is slavishly followed as though the classic poetry required illustration in a deliberately traditional manner.

Archaism as an expression for too powerful emotions, joined with carelessness of execution and renunciation of proportion and restraint, explain the difficult problem of the mass of Madonnas, the portraits and the historic pictures, the allegories, and all the strange, ugly, and mannered pictures which issued from Botticelli's workshop. In religious pictures Archaism is always a valued quality. The hieratic mind shrinks naturally from a too naturalistic rendering of the divine image; the older and the less living the representation, the more suggestion of the other world does it possess. There must have been many in Florence who were as shocked by Filippo Lippi's living Madonnas as by his sins against his habit. They would have found what they wished in Benozzo Gozzoli's or Cosimo Rosselli's rigid and hard echoes of Fra Angelico's tradition. Close at hand, perhaps even Botticelli's first influence in art, was that Neri di Bicci who continued throughout the century to manufacture not paintings but painted images, which were as nearly like to the altar-pieces and lunettes of ancient times as orthodox but vulgar taste could wish them. There are masses of paintings of this type hidden away in Florentine galleries, and all show the same combination of old-fashioned forms with just

## BOTTICELLI AS PAINTER

enough of contemporary influence to render them palatable. It is not improbable that the workshop of Botticelli catered in its day for this public, pouring forth with little effort caricatures of the finest work of the master in a style which through its hardness and exaggeration recalled the features of paintings old enough to be considered holy. Hideously hard portraits with contorted outlines and deliberately exaggerated features may have had the same origin. Nor is Botticelli himself to be held irresponsible and all the blame to be thrown upon his pupils. His own characteristics, excess of significance, exaggeration of emotion, superabundant vehemence, all found in the imitation of primitive art an easier expression than by the discovery of new and adequate forms. The Savonarolan heresy and its denial of the beauty and value of the external world found its natural expression in these works, and even if Botticelli had started on this path before he became Savonarolan, when the preacher appeared he was ready.

## CHAPTER V

### THE INFLUENCE OF BOTTICELLI

AS is natural in the case of a man of the second rank, the good in Botticelli became immersed in the good of greater men, the bad attracted only the weaker. Thus both good and bad died out and became lost to memory, except as a tradition of brilliant promise and unsatisfactory achievement. The more universal and valuable tendencies of the complex personality came to fruition only when developed by stronger men, while the more individual peculiarities—what in common and incorrect language is known as personality—were easily imitated by the baser sort, and after a short period of popularity fell into disfavour and became sterile.

Of the influence for good which Botticelli exercised it is not easy to find definite traces. Outliving his own powers, he saw his virtues bear their fruit during his lifetime. His one distinguished pupil, Filippino Lippi, came to maturity and passed into decline almost simultaneously with his master. Botticelli was no striking innovator whose influence even on contemporaries can be easily determined. Rather he kept alive, and used for the easy expression of his own ideas, the forms and the achievements which others had attained by their own discovery

## THE INFLUENCE OF BOTTICELLI

and labour. Yet it is possible to assume his effects, even where they cannot be definitely traced; and if his influence was effective rather in passing on the discoveries of other men than in making innovations for himself, yet this is no small work, and to contemporaries perhaps as great as any.

His strength and his vehemence when most controlled and dignified make Botticelli in certain of his works one of the most striking precursors at Florence of the classic Renaissance. He could render the simple dignity of the human figure without the austerity of the Pollaiuoli or Castagno; his nudes were supple and full of charm as well as bold and strong, his compositions pleasing as well as unaffected and direct. Florentine art tended either to excrescences and extravagances which were inherited from mediæval tradition and were likely to flourish too luxuriantly in the brilliant and fantastic atmosphere of the city, or to the harshness and the intellectualism of the new-born science. Botticelli did something to reconcile the two tendencies. At his best, his simple line and powerful contour, his breadth of treatment and massive planes, bring him almost to the threshold of the sixteenth century.

Something of the spirit of the *Mars*, for example, remains in Michelangelo's easel pictures and in the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel. The men were friends, and Michelangelo may well, in turning from the dulness and trivialities of Ghirlandaio's workshop, have learned more than he could ever realise from the purity and the graceful strength of this simple figure. But there is a nearer connection than

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

this between the two painters. Both were ardent students of Dante, and illustrators of his work. Under the hard outlines of Botticelli's more or less finished illustrations the careful observer may discern more spontaneous and sympathetic pencillings in silver point which both in size and in treatment recall many of Michelangelo's drawings. There is no little of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the whole conception of this *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, and if to this be added resemblances in detail, the connection is established. Signorelli's is the more obvious influence on Michelangelo, but it is not alone, and it is not impossible that Signorelli, too, learned something from his not unsympathetic contemporary at Florence.

On Leonardo the influence is more evident. He mentions Botticelli in his *Notes*, if disparagingly, for his neglect of landscape. In two directions, at least, he carried further features which Botticelli indicated. He was intent upon the decorative unity of the picture, the one element which is, however unsuccessfully, kept constantly before Botticelli even in his most ununified histories. He insisted that all painting, all expression, and all movement should be significant of mental activity. This was the distinguishing characteristic which led Botticelli to his ruin. Vehemence, which was the method by which Botticelli most readily sought to obtain significance, was the feature in Leonardo's great cartoon of the *Battle of Anghiari* which most impressed his contemporaries. Tumults and uproars, flashing movements of men fighting and horses biting, the thousand incidents of warfare,

## THE INFLUENCE OF BOTTICELLI

formed a subject which Botticelli would have loved had he had power to paint it. But in lesser matters also the two men show their relation. The latest *Adoration* at the Uffizi is so near to Leonardo's that to many it appears to be itself a sign of his influence on Botticelli. But there is nothing to support this theory, and, on the contrary, the picture finds so natural a place in the development of Botticelli's work that there is no reason to go outside his mind in order to account for its conception. The effort towards a receding space which this picture shows is as pronounced in the earlier *Adoration* in the same gallery (Plate VI.), and this was the best known and the most praised of all the pictures by Botticelli in Florence. In it there is more than a germ of Leonardo, and in the rows of lessening figures which in the Sistine fresco of the *Temptation* recall this *Adoration*, there is not only a foretaste of Leonardo's treatment, but also a hint that Raphael may have studied it before he painted the Leonardesque figures in his fresco of the *Disputa*. Something too of Botticelli's careful and restrained patterning seems to have passed into the portraits which emanate from Leonardo's school if not from himself, and little as his landscapes were praised by Leonardo, his painting of trees and flowers, more even his drawing of them, as it appears in the Dante illustrations, may have appealed to and influenced the younger man.

But all this is very problematic, since there were other channels through which both Botticelli and the younger generation may have derived these characteristics. It is more certain that Botticelli had a host of pupils and imi-

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

tators who caricatured and reproduced his mannerisms for a brief generation, and had a certain popularity until they were supplanted by other fashions. Among the works which they produced many have much of Botticelli's charm and spirit, scarcely any have a touch of his real vigour. Among their works are many delightful Madonnas, all the more appreciated because their inferiorities of workmanship emphasize the charm of their spirit, and not less beloved because their exaggerations render their spirit more obvious and easily recognised. They have left us also, in painting and engraving, certain pleasant little histories and illustrations in which the narrative attracts by its appearance of naïveté, and certain portraits which delight partly from the excess of sentiment in the expression and partly from the eccentricities of ornament with which the painters tricked out their want of solid observation and real decorative power.

With his greater qualities merged into the general current of art, and his more individual peculiarities thrown into disfavour by newer fashions Botticelli passed into almost complete oblivion. He was classed among the mannerists who worked in a hard and dry fashion which was not painting. Material disregard is of course, accountable for much in this want of appreciation. The pictures were cast aside, and, if not already rendered invisible by dirt, were not accessible, or were unsuitable to contemporary schemes of decoration. The rebirth of a painter comes slowly as picture after picture is discovered and identified, and then given a prominence which corresponds



## THE INFLUENCE OF BOTTICELLI

to the painter's place in contemporary thought. But the renaissance of Botticelli and of the whole Quattrocento during the nineteenth century is not purely the effect of the cleaning and hanging of the pictures; just as the Renaissance of classic art was not merely due to the excavation of antiquities. A spirit requires to be reborn which not only leads men to search for the forgotten remains but also to appreciate those which have always been before their eyes.

In Botticelli the quality which led to this rebirth was partly negative. Men had grown tired of the complicated structure of illusion which the traditions of the schools had laid down as a necessity in painting. His comparative simplicity of design and colour gave him a dignity and an air of authentic, spontaneous feeling which more elaborate methods of decoration fail to possess. There is an effect of austerity and restraint about the mere technical character of tempera painting, and it has a suggestion of some primitive virtue and excellence. This is of course illusory to a great extent, for there is nothing primitive in the extreme skill and dexterity which even earlier painters than Botticelli expended in their technique, nor are their exaggerations of line and attitude any more primitive and authentic than the floridity of later ages. The painters of the Quattrocento could be just as empty decorators, and just as little filled with a sense of conscientious and religious effort, as their successors of the seventeenth century. Greater knowledge of the period and the prominence given by the excess of fashion to second-rate works, are having their effect in



## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

removing the fanciful illusions of the original discoverers, but to them the mere absence of the conventions of which they were tired was sufficient recommendation of their discoveries.

But there is another and a positive side to the resurrection of the Quattrocento. The greater painters of the full Renaissance assumed into themselves all the qualities of their precursors, but welded them into a mass of such duly balanced proportion that the single separate qualities entered as parts only within a greater whole. Imitators attempted to reproduce the effect of wholeness and proportion only, and therefore they became vapid and empty. Dignity, nobility, balance, solidity, which are the qualities of proportion, soon come to lack intimacy and immediate emotional appeal. Accident and over-emphasis appeal to the minor emotions, which are crushed out of the greater conceptions, as the greatest tragedies call forth no tears, and are absent through mere vapidness of imagination from the empty dignity or the grandiloquence of the shadows of the great. These minor emotions, however, inspired much of the art of the Quattrocento. It was an experimental and tentative age, and it gave expression in full and exaggerated form to all its various tendencies of mind. Naturally therefore the complicated modern temperament harks back to these appearances of earlier and uncertain effort. This, too, is an age of conflict and uncertainty, of disputed authority and disproportionate views. It is an age without grandeur and almost without dignity, of violent emotionalism and no general canons of judgment.

## THE INFLUENCE OF BOTTICELLI

Consequently the immediate and natural appeal to this generation is made less by the universality and proportion of the masterpieces of the succeeding age than by the efforts towards expression of the precursors. There is a sign that empty grandiosity will soon assert its claims, and that millionaires and luxurious amateurs will revive the empty splendours of a still later age, but that is not yet.

It is above all by his expression of the spirit of trouble that Botticelli has won his renewed glory. The repainting by Rossetti of the portrait of Smeralda in the Ionides collection shows what qualities were seen in Botticelli by one of his earliest admirers. Pater, who has done more than any other writer to bring Botticelli into the world of English thought, emphasises this aspect by his fanciful identification of Botticelli's intention with the heresy which represented the human race as the 'incarnation of those angels who, in the revolt of Lucifer, were neither for Jehovah nor for His enemies,' and he explains on this ground the peculiar sentiment of his figures as 'the wistfulness of exiles, conscious of a passion and energy greater than any known issue of them explains.' Trouble and uncertainty give to Botticelli's creations the air of life and reality which is the first requirement of art, and unlike the agony and magnificent striving which remove Michelangelo's conflict from the sphere of daily emotion, their human weakness,—neither of heroic angels nor of damned souls,—brings them with peculiar intimacy into the hearts of the contemporary world.

Yet this very intimacy with the lesser emotions which

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

gives Botticelli his charm, is itself a sign of weakness and of want of universality. Botticelli has life, but not the greatest, the most desirable life. As was said of the man, you are free to take him or leave him. Perhaps it would be better to leave him. Want of universality led him to disproportion and exaggeration. Indulgence in his art soon leads to a loss of a true grip on life. His revival of popularity, even, coincides with a divorce between the ideas of the artistic and of the active world. Such indulgence as his in the emotions of weakness is not that of either the ordinary man or of the greater man; it is a backwater or a refuge from life which is good for a moment, but cannot be the whole. Hence the dominance of Botticelli and of an art akin to his means that to most men art seems something apart from and different from life. This in the end would be the death of art.

Therefore in estimating Botticelli it is better not to dwell so much upon the wistful charm of his shrinking Madonnas or Venuses, his agitation and vehemence, his half-tones and loose design, as upon the strong colour and vigorous patterning of certain groups and figures, and upon the calm and dignified strength of his mature conception of man. The whole combination of strength and weakness, of complication and simplicity, of power and feebleness of will, makes up the personality of fascination and charm which is Botticelli's; but the strength is necessary even for the appreciation of the weakness, and, more important still, it helped, and can help, others towards the creation of greater things.

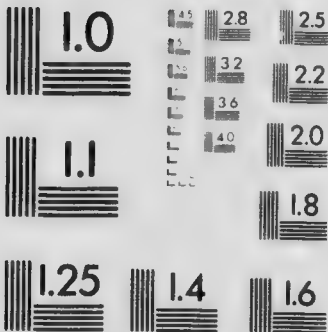
SANDRO BOTTICELLI

TWENTY-FIVE PLATES IN COLOUR, SELECTED  
AND EXECUTED UNDER THE SUPERVISION  
OF THE MEDICI SOCIETY



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2



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## JUDITH

FLORENCE, UFFIZI, No. 1156

JUDITH with the head of Holofernes was a favourite subject with Botticelli. Besides in the little picture in the Uffizi, he used the subject in one of the reliefs in the *Calumny* (Plate xvi.), and later still he painted a more dramatic representation of Judith issuing from the tent holding the head in her hand (Kaufmann Collection at Berlin). The vehement action of a fair form attracted him, not only by its opportunities for figure-painting but also for the complicated surprises of the mental attitude. In the later picture Judith is somewhat haggard and nervously exultant. Here she is merely innocent, resolute, and strong; a *Fortitude* in action; and with all her strength, her character is poignant, thoughtful, and not without its dreams.

The picture is still very playful. Judith's pose and her drapery are fantastic. There are numerous choice details in the headdress, the drapery, and the accessories. Her figure flutters rather than steps or walks. All of this belongs to the period and is a mark of premature luxuriance. There is too much foliage and too little fruit. But this luxuriance could be corrected by increased skill and greater

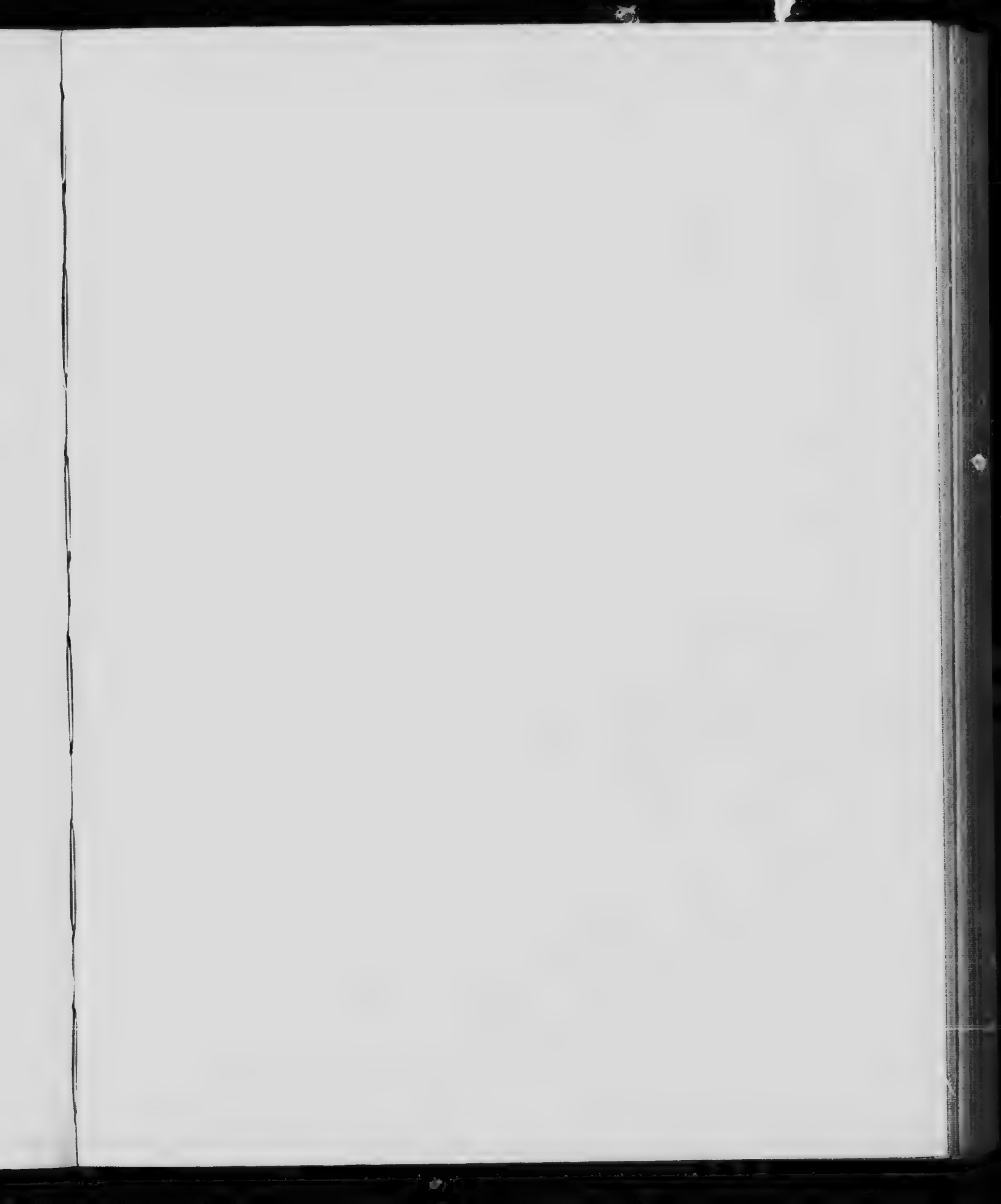


## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

seriousness. It is not like the stereotyped exuberance of the painters of the end of the century, a fault observable in Botticelli himself to some degree, but more often counteracted by his too emphatic significance.

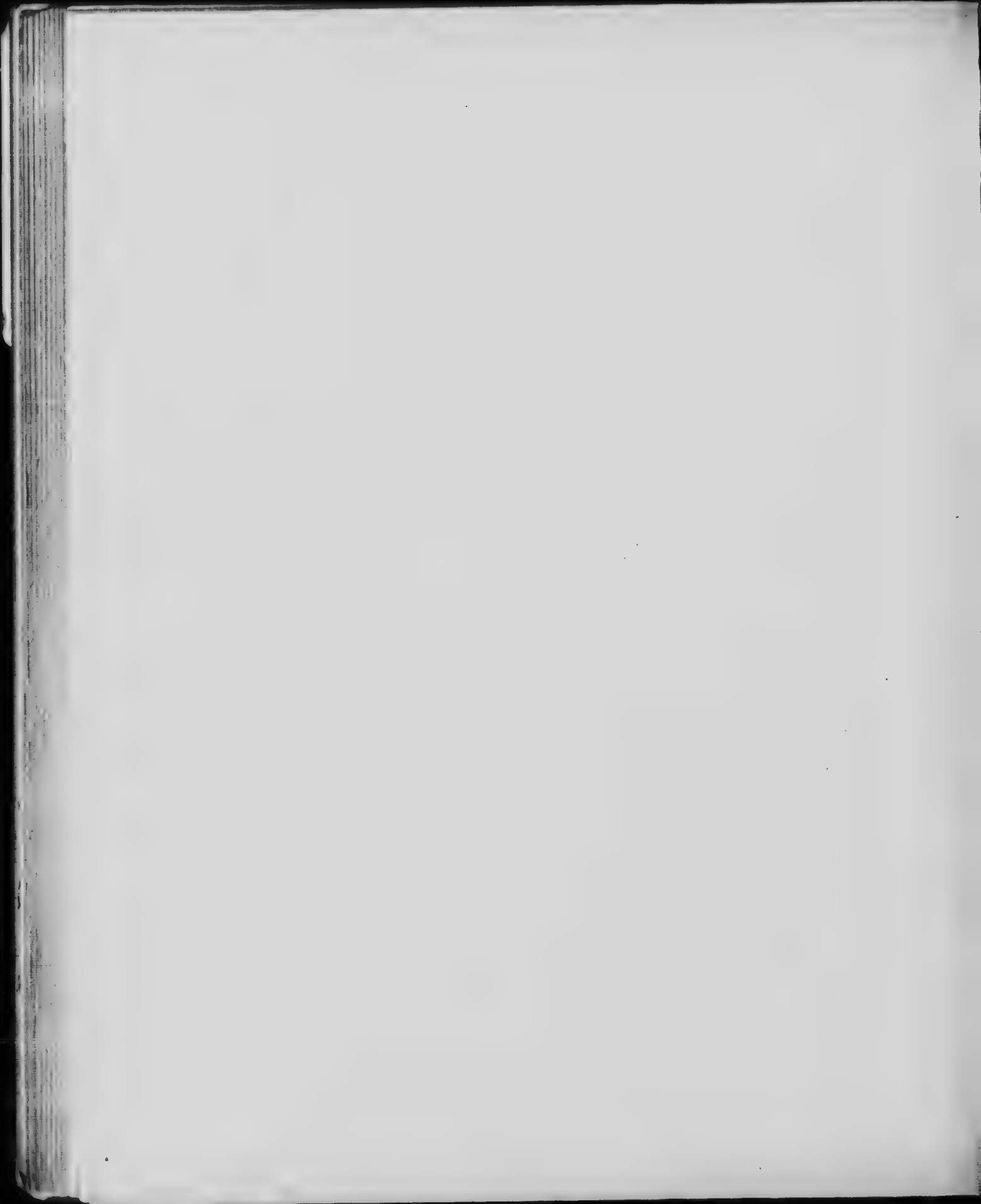
The background of the *Judith* recalls that of the *Sz. Sebastian* (Plate III.). The handmaid has a series of precursors in Florentine art; she recurs again in duplicate in the Sistine fresco of the *Temptation*. There Botticelli relapses into meaningless contortions of drapery. Here the figure is strong, over-strong and mannish perhaps, but something in her pose passes over and stiffens the figure of Judith.

This picture together with one of the finding of Holofernes are recorded in 1584 as having been together in the collection of Ridolfo Sirigatti. He gave them to the Grand Duchess Bianca Capello de' Medici as ornaments for a writing cabinet, and from the Grand Ducal Collection they passed into the Uffizi Gallery. The two pictures are very diverse in colour, composition, and treatment; but the *Judith* has evidently been over-cleaned and thereby gained a cool transparency, which is very different from the thick hot tints of the *Holofernes*; and the differences in composition are not surprising in works which are rather exercises by an apprentice hand than the free performance of a master.









## II

# PORTRAIT OF A MAN WITH A MEDAL

FLORENCE, UFFIZI, No. 1154

**T**RADITION gives no name to the painter of the *Portrait of a Man* in the Uffizi Gallery. The greatest of the conservative school of art-critics, Morelli, first attributed it to Botticelli, and the attribution has been generally accepted, although not without some reasonable dissension and much conflict of opinion regarding its date. Morelli did not attempt to give a name to the man who is represented by the painting. His successors mainly agree in tracing in it the characteristic features of the Medici family, but there is no unanimity in fixing upon the actual member of that family represented. One thing is certain: the picture, whether by Botticelli or not, is far too early in date to be a portrait of Piero di Lorenzo dei Medici, as it is generally described.

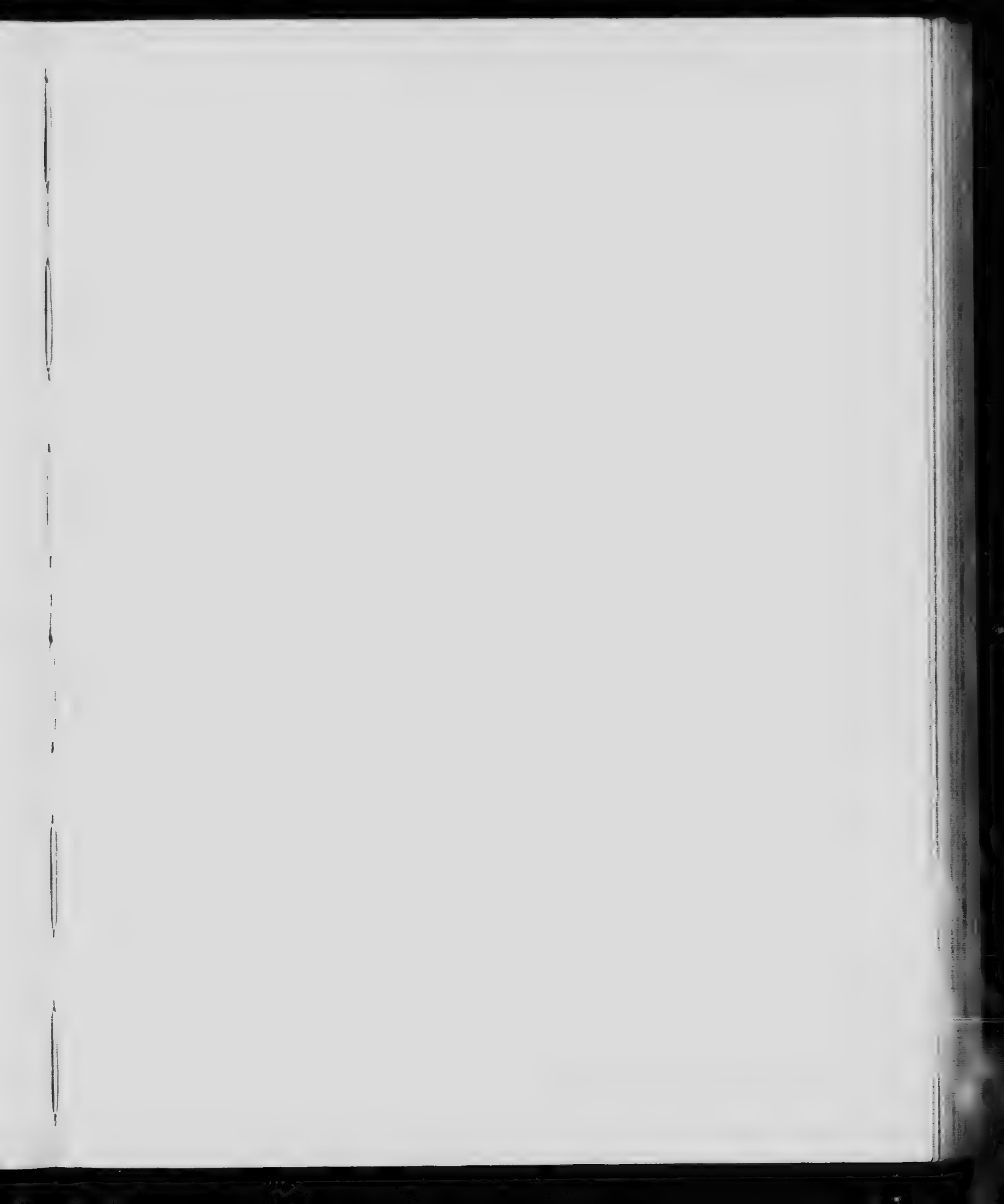
The influence of Antonio Pollaiuolo is paramount in this head. It is certainly characteristic of Botticelli at this early period that the features should be marked with such salience and such strong shadows that the general structure of the head appears to be lost in the prominence of the individual features. There is an effect as of too

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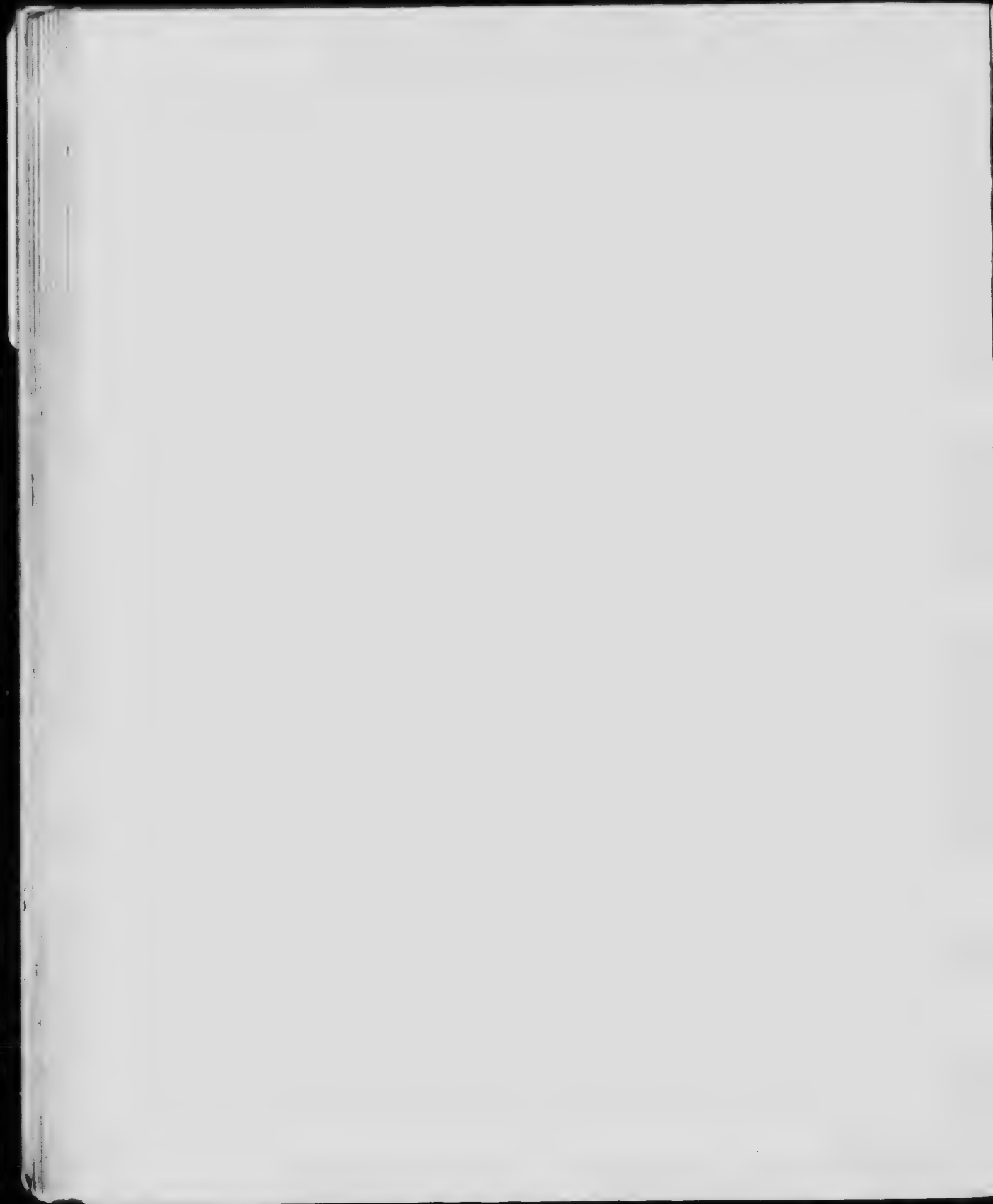
## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

great liveliness in a hard and resisting material. The distortion of the hands may be in part due to restoration, but the distortion of the features is due to an over-great realism and to too vehement a characterisation. As often happens, the young painter forecasts some of the mannerisms of his decline. But there is a difference between the distortion due to youth and that which is due to age.

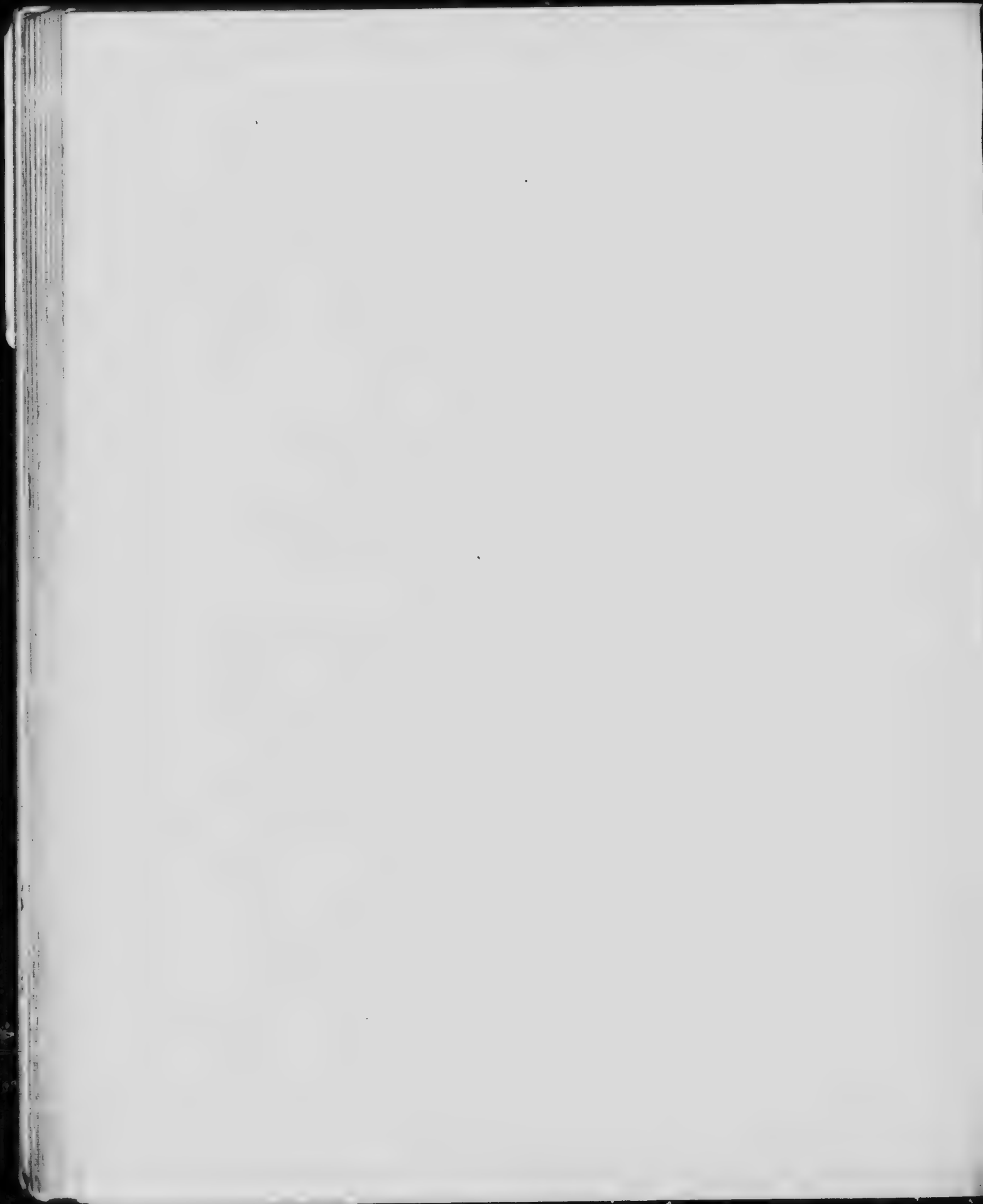
The landscape is Florence. The medal is perhaps an actual cast from one of Cosimo the First, attributed to Michelozzo. The head upon it, with its breadth of treatment and its repose, forms a strong contrast to the unruly lines and exaggerated planes of the portrait-bust itself.











### III

## ST. SEBASTIAN

BERLIN, No. 1128

THE earliest work by Botticelli to which an exact date can be affixed is a picture of *St. Sebastian* which he painted for the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in 1473. One of the early notices of his life speaks of this picture as dating from January 1474, that being probably the date of the inscription recording the dedication of the picture, since the feast of the Saint occurs on the 20th of the month. The same notice records that the panel was placed on a pillar in the church.

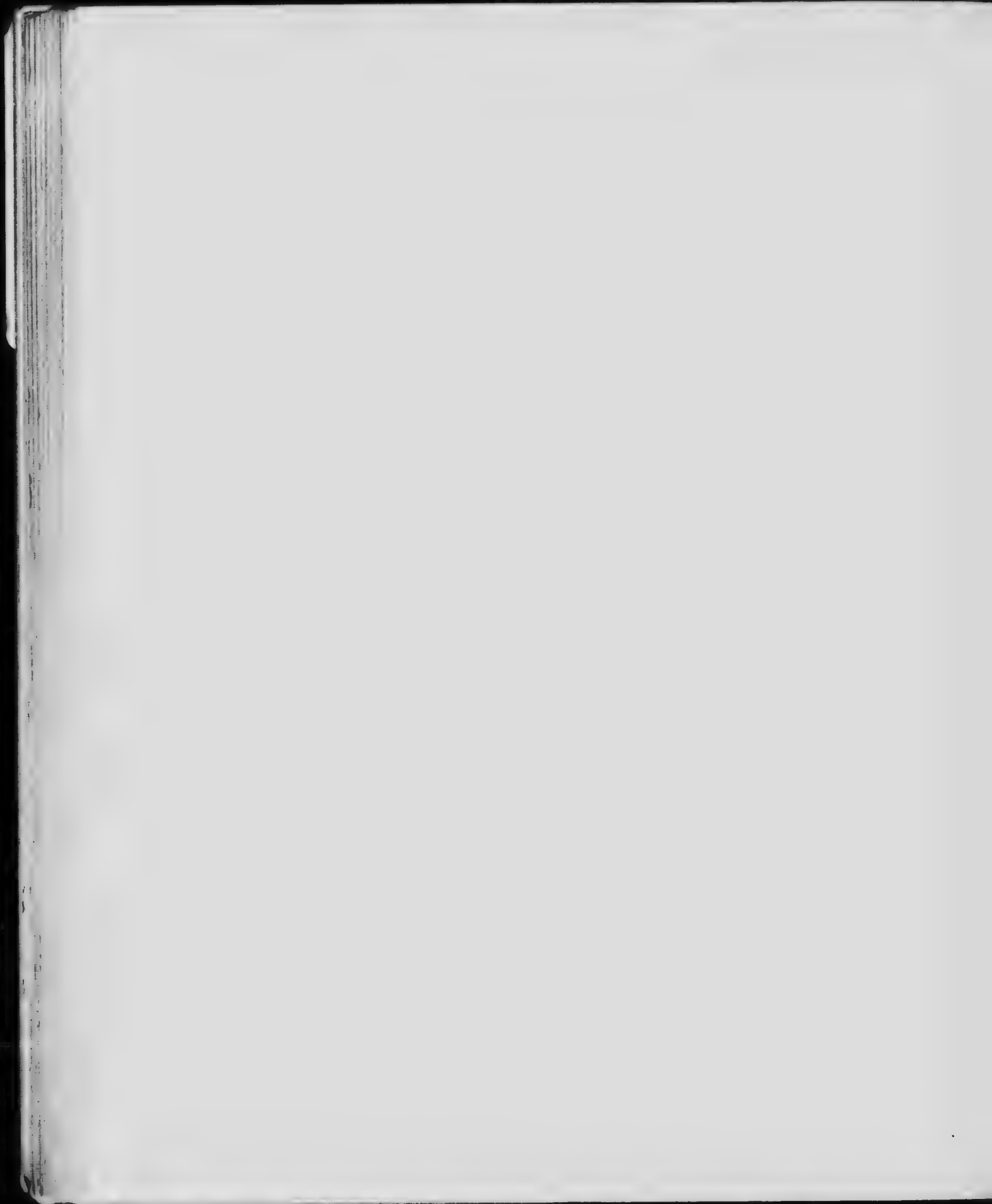
This *St. Sebastian* soon disappeared from the church. In 1821 the Prussian Government bought, among other pictures, from an Englishman named Solly a picture of this subject which was thought to be by Antonio Pollaiuolo. If, as has been generally agreed since the suggestion was first made by Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle, this is the lost picture by Botticelli, it can almost rival the National Gallery picture of the *Nativity* in its claim to be the first picture by Botticelli brought from Italy. In both cases it is noticeable that the admirer was an Englishman.

Had Mr. Solly's picture remained in England it might perhaps have hung in the National Gallery beside the *St.*

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

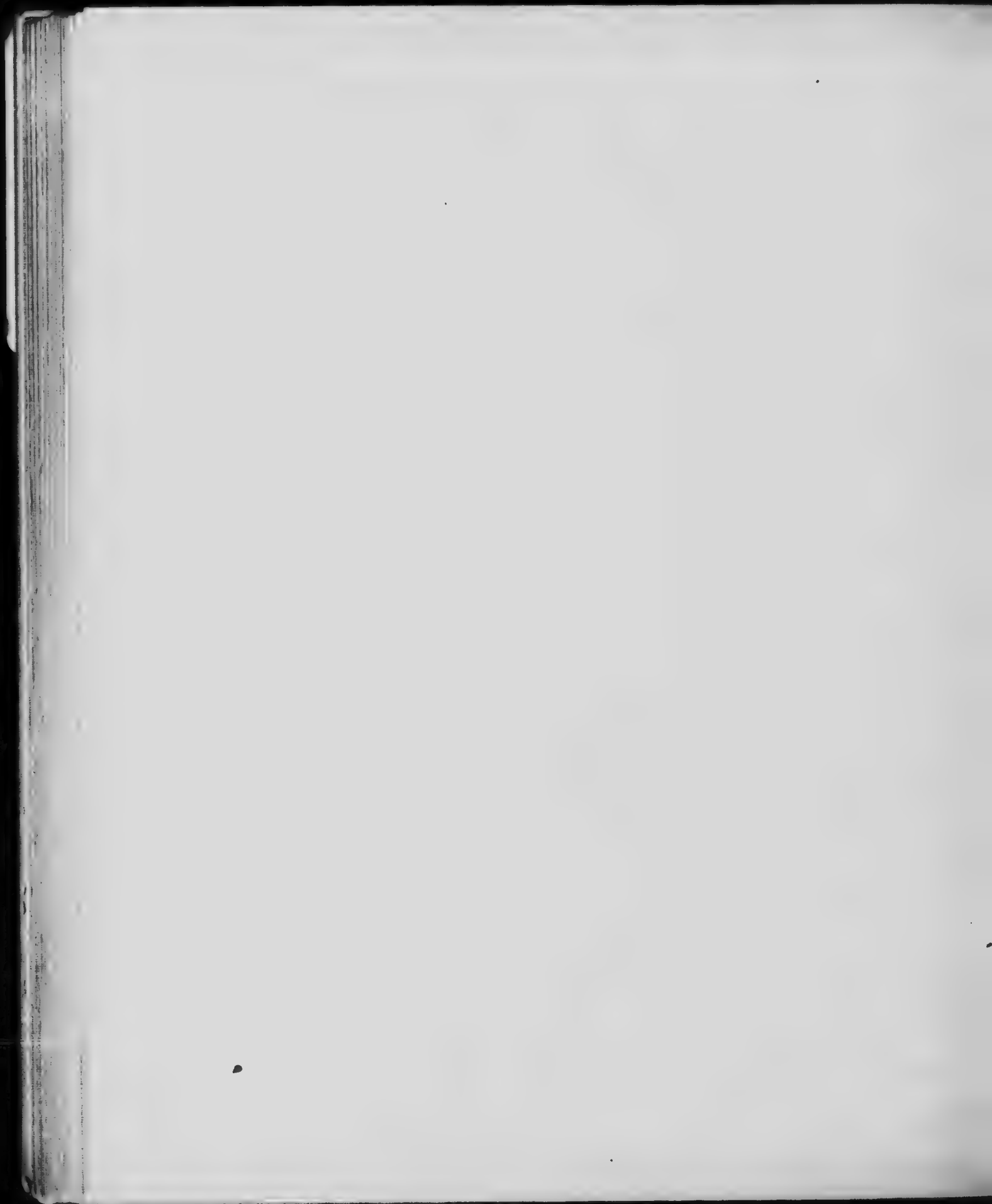
*Sebastian* of Antonio Pollaiuolo, to which picture, as might have been expected from the traditional ascription, it bears considerable resemblance. Botticelli, unlike Pollaiuolo, makes no attempt to reproduce the pain of the martyr's death, and the head, with its strong, sensuous features and wealth of curly hair, expresses neither agony nor consciousness of victory over death. But the firm relief of the body, its apparent realism of form and its coarse extremities; more still, the little figures in the background and the setting of the Saint upon the foot of a tree, recall Pollaiuolo and his *St. Sebastian* in particular. So strong are these resemblances that, if Vasari is right in dating Pollaiuolo's picture to the year 1475, the Berlin picture would seem not to be the same as that painted for Santa Maria Maggiore in 1473, but a later painting by Botticelli of the same subject. Whether this is so or not, the painting of the nude remains essentially the same, nor does the character of the head alter considerably in pictures such as the *Spring* (Plate v.) and even the *Mars and Venus* (Plate xii.), which are generally attributed to a much later date. To avoid placing Botticelli's picture later than 1473, it has been conjectured that Antonio Pollaiuolo painted another and an earlier *St. Sebastian* sufficiently like to the picture in the National Gallery to produce similarities with it in Botticelli's picture.











IV

ST. AUGUSTINE

CHURCH OF THE OGNISANTI, FLORENCE

THE fresco of *St. Augustine* in the church of Ognisanti was painted by Botticelli as a companion picture to the fresco of St. Jerome, by Domenico Ghirlandaio, in the same church. Ghirlandaio's fresco bears the date 1480; there is no reason to suppose that Botticelli's does not date from the same year. Both frescoes were moved in 1564, while the second edition of Vasari's *Lives* was in the press, from the screen which separated the choir and the nave to their present position on the walls of the nave. Vasari describes how they were bound with irons for their removal. The operation has done them little harm, but they have lost their original decorative surroundings which their present borders, painted at the time of the removal, do not adequately replace. The Latin inscriptions placed above each fresco have reference to the removal.

Vasari gives the information that the frescoes were commissioned by a member of the Vespucci family which, like Botticelli's own, lived in this quarter of Florence. Both the principal branches of the family and many members of each had chapels, altars, or burial-places in the

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

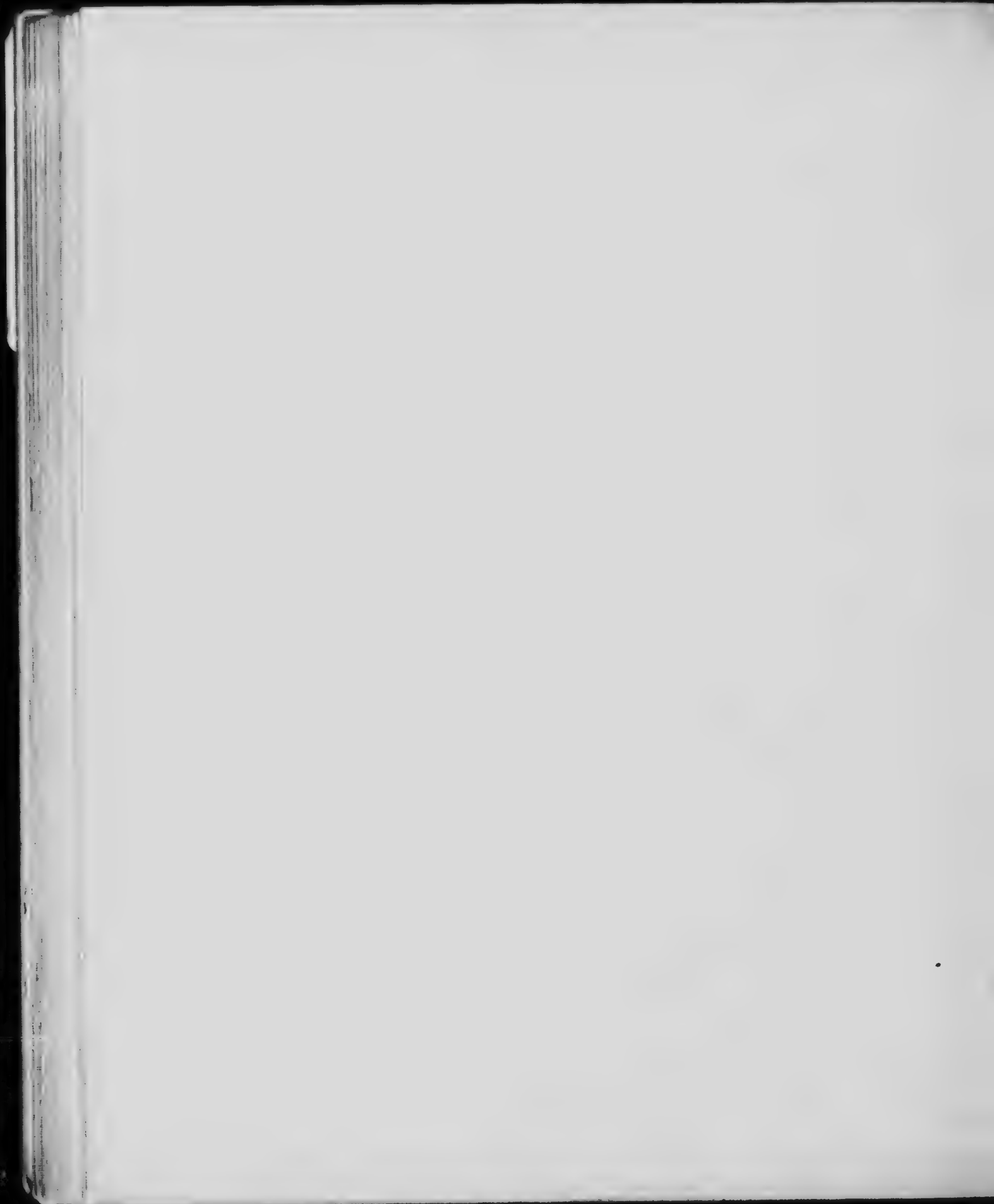
church. It is not easy, therefore, to choose the one most likely to have given this commission. Mr. Horne suggests that it was Ser Nastagio Vespucci, a member of the branch which had its house in the same street as that of Botticelli, and the son of one Amerigo Vespucci who, like Botticelli, was buried in the cemetery of this church (in 1472) and had an altar there. If so, Botticelli painted this fresco for the father of the famous navigator, Amerigo Vespucci, who gave his name to the continent which he helped to discover.

Vasari says of this fresco that Botticelli, excited by the competition with Ghirlandaio, made great exertions for its perfection, and that it was greatly praised at the time for its representation of such deep thought and acute intellect as belong to men who are engaged in the investigation of the highest things. Most writers now agree that Botticelli has far surpassed Ghirlandaio, though Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle found the *St. Augustine* lacking in dignity. This effect is caused by the extent to which Botticelli attempts to give intensity and strength to the figure. It becomes hard and somewhat heavy, and the large, coarse hands are so carefully disposed that they appear mannered and uneasy.









## THE SPRING

FLORENCE, ACADEMY

THE allegories of the *Spring* and the *Birth of Venus* were early in the sixteenth century in a villa belonging to Giovanni delle Bande Nere, a member of the Medici family, at Castello, near Florence. The conjecture that they were painted for Lorenzo the Magnificent in this villa is quite unfounded. In the first place, Lorenzo never owned this villa, which appears to have come to Giovanni from his uncle Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco; and in the second place, there is no proof that the pictures were painted for the villa. It is, however, quite possible that they, together with several other paintings mentioned as being in this villa at a later date, were painted for it; and Mr. Horne accordingly conjectures that the *Spring* was painted soon after Lorenzo built the villa in 1477. The point is not proved, but the suggestion is plausible. As Lorenzo was born in 1463, he showed a somewhat precocious taste in pagan allegory.

The two pictures remained in the villa until in 1815 they were taken to the Uffizi. The *Spring* was not exhibited until it was transferred, at some date before 1864, to the Academy. It appears then to have been cleaned,



## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

and the treatment to which it was subjected, in order to rid it of worm, is responsible for the blackening of its colour and for the removal of nearly all the gold which originally was sprinkled profusely over all its surface. Its present romantic sombreness, however attractive it may be, cannot be attributed to the intention of the painter.

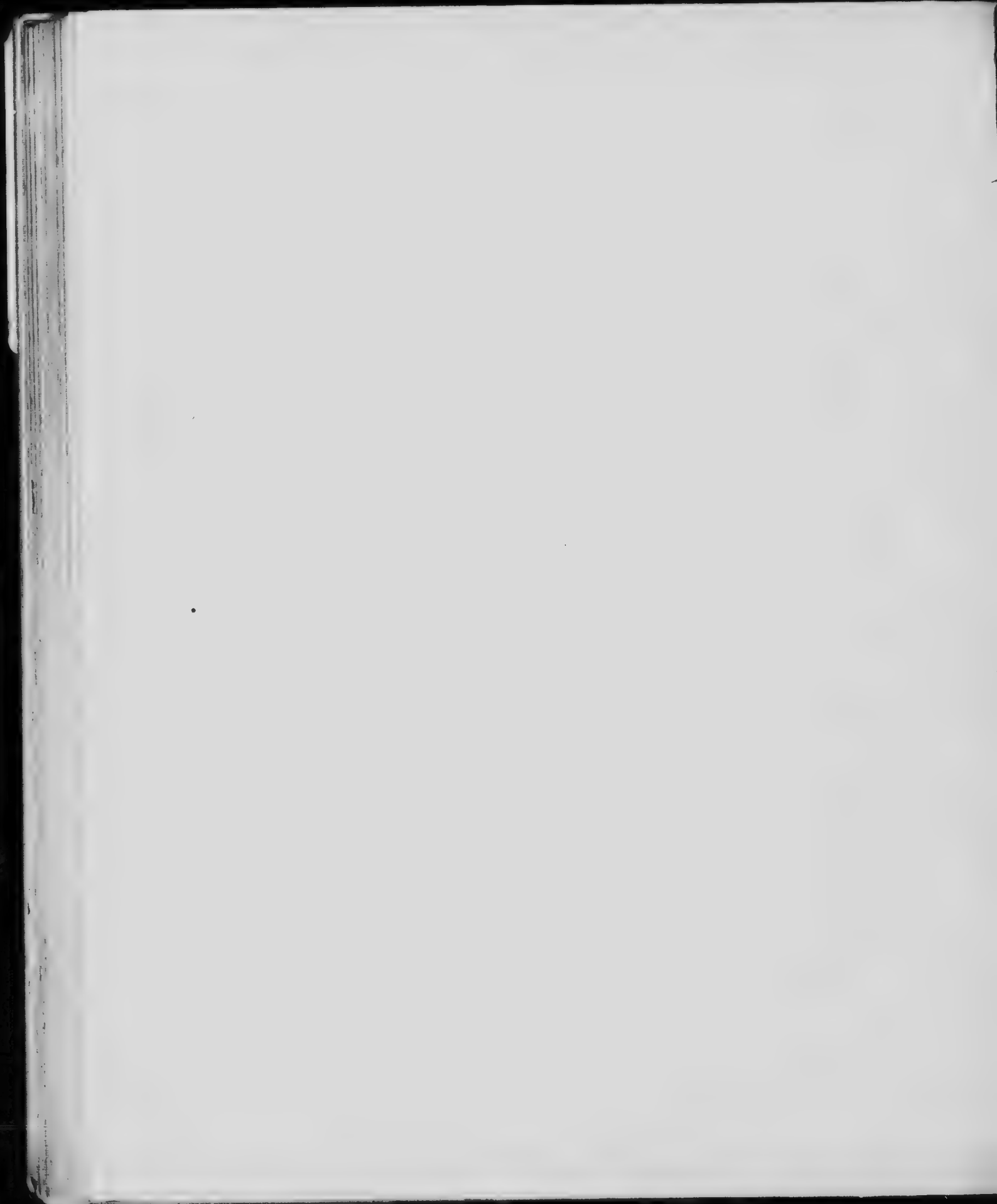
In 1598, when the picture was in the dining-room of the Grand Duke, it was described as representing 'Three Goddesses who are dancing, and Cupid above and Mercury and other figures.' Vasari is not much more illuminating: 'A Venus whom the Graces adorn with flowers, signifying the Spring,' he says of it. The road is open to conjecture, and it has been freely and fancifully trodden. The most plausible suggestion connects the painting with a passage in the then newly discovered *De Rerum Natura* of Lucretius (v. 737), describing the advance of Spring and Venus, preceded by Cupid and by Flora, who in Zephyr's footsteps strews their road with flowers and sweet scents. Elsewhere Botticelli shows himself a very literal follower of the text, but here, besides adding the Graces and Mercury to the throng, he has, if his picture has anything to do with the quotation, reversed the procession. Venus is in the centre with Cupid hovering above her. Zephyr blows upon the Spring and touches her with less violence in his hands than might be expected from his swooping flight and her startled air. Flowers fall from her mouth as he breathes upon her, while close before her Flora moves lightly over the ground. On the other side

## THE SPRING

of Venus, the Graces dance and Mercury raises his hand to an orange upon the tree.

Definite resemblances with the work of the Pollaiuoli, and a general air of immaturity in drawing and uncertainty in composition, suggest a comparatively early date for the picture. Its weaknesses are obvious, but they cannot succeed in destroying its beauty, and there is a freshness in some of the figures which is absent from Botticelli's more mature work. Even the clumsy form and gait of the third Grace cannot spoil the impression of sinuous movement and the exquisite pattern of the group. Flora takes the eye from Venus, and the ugly colour and coarse forms of Zephyr and the Spring offend only for a second. The picture must be taken not so much in detail—save for the group of the Graces—as for the spirit of the whole allegory, and it then becomes a slow, rhythmical advance telling at length of the arrival of the Spring. Originally its dazzling, noonday colouring might have caused the movement to appear too languid; but now, in the darkened colouring of twilight, the spirits dance with the pathetic silence of ghosts.





VI

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

FLORENCE, UFFIZI

**B**OTTICELLI appears to have painted the *Adoration of the Magi* five or six times in all. Two pictures now generally attributed to him are in the National Gallery (Nos. 592 and 1033). They date from his early years. Another is in the Hermitage, at St. Petersburg (No. 3). A fourth is known to have stood above a destroyed staircase in the Palazzo de' Signori in Florence, and if it is not represented in an unfinished picture at the Uffizi (No. 3436), that picture would make a fifth.

But the most famous *Adoration* by him was that painted for Santa Maria Novella and originally placed between the doors of that church. Vasari asserts, probably by conjecture, that it was painted before Botticelli's visit to Rome in 1481. It was commissioned by a member of the merchant family 'Lami' or 'da Lama,' whose connection with the Medici, who are much honoured in the painting, is not recorded. A reconstruction of the altar shortly after 1568 caused the picture to disappear, but it has now been universally identified with a panel in the Uffizi which had passed in the Grand Ducal Collection as a work of Ghirlandaio.

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

Vasari is enthusiastic in his praise of this picture. He attributes to it Botticelli's commission to superintend the decoration of the Sistine Chapel at Rome. It stood in his eyes as the monument of Botticelli's merit amidst the ruin which he made of his life. Even in his own day, he says, every artist marvelled at it. Certainly for brilliance and harmony of colour, concentration and excellence of composition, variety and dignity in the attitudes, and nobility and characterisation in the faces, the picture is of surpassing merit. It is the sanest and most complete of Botticelli's compositions of many figures, and the one which is most free from any vulgarities or exaggerations, personal or of the period. Only on the left side of the picture, where shadow falls on the group of the adorers, does something of restless and over-animated drawing persist from the earlier Pollaiuolesque period and contrast unfavourably with the serene breadth of the figures on the other side. If it was painted at about the same date as the *Spring*, no doubt the smallness of the scale accounts for the greater maturity of the composition.

The picture was famous for its portraits. In the kneeling figure of a Magus about to kiss the foot of the Infant, Vasari saw Cosimo de' Medici, and in the figure immediately below the Virgin his grandson, Giuliano. This, as Mr. Horne points out, must be an error, for Giuliano was murdered at the age of twenty-five, and the head resembles closely that of Piero, Giuliano's father. The third Magus, bending towards Piero, is said by Vasari to be Giovanni, his younger brother, represented as in his youth. These

## THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

three were all dead when the picture was painted. Portraits of contemporaries are also found in the picture, but none can be identified with any certainty save that of Botticelli himself standing in the right-hand corner and looking proudly away from the scene that he had painted. The features are those of the head painted a few years later by Filippino in the Brancacci Chapel and traditionally accepted as a portrait of Botticelli.







VII

THE MADONNA OF THE  
MAGNIFICAT

FLORENCE, UFFIZI, No. 1267 bis

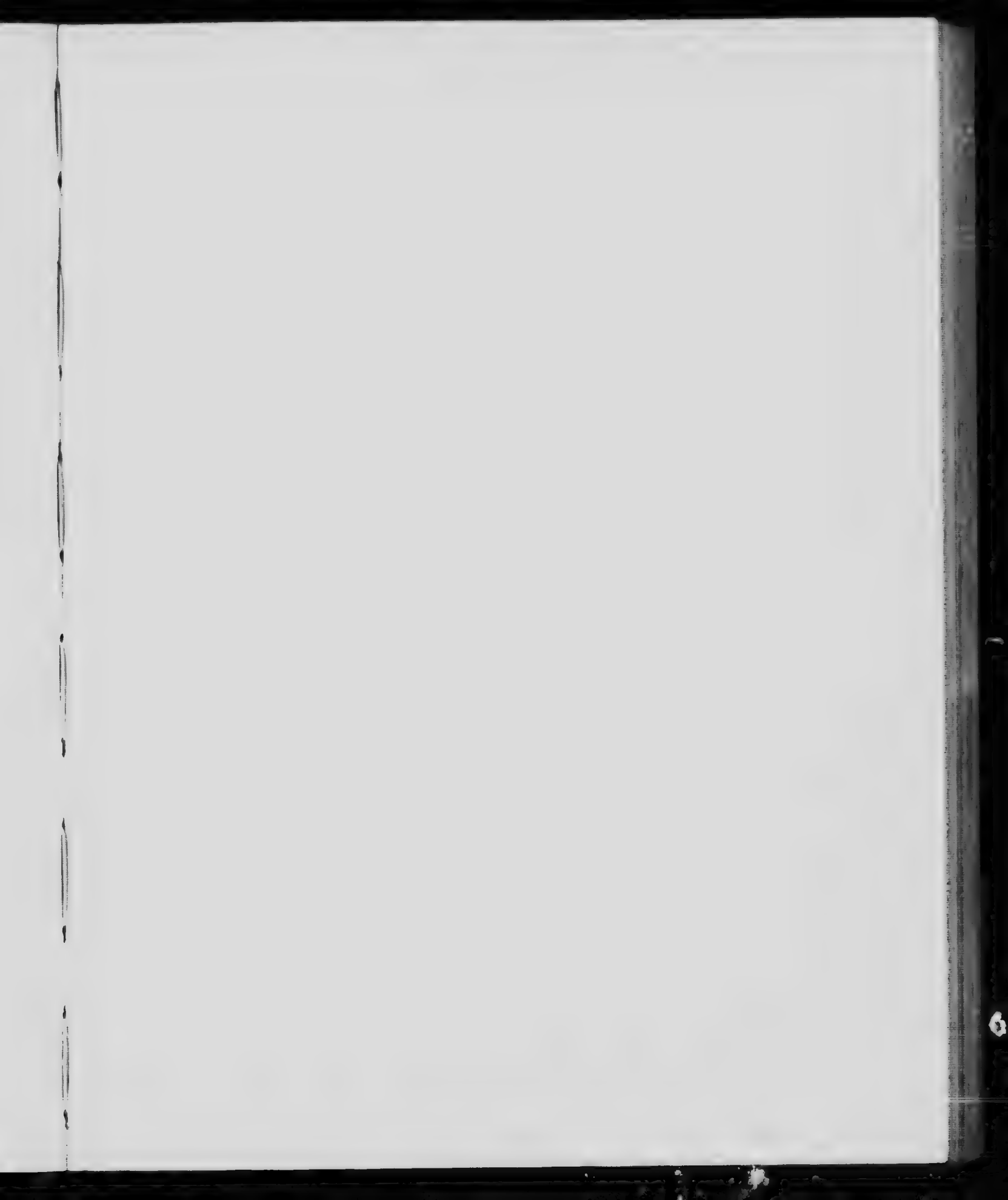
NOTHING is known for certain about the history of the *Madonna of the Magnificat* except that it was bought for the Uffizi in 1784. Several versions of it exist, but none can be identified with plausibility as the picture by Botticelli in the church of San Francesco, outside the Porta San Miniato, which Vasari describes as containing eight angels, and a slightly later writer as representing the Madonna and Child surrounded by angels who are singing with much grace. The angels are not singing, nor are they eight in number. There is no documentary evidence to date the picture, and from the evidence of style nothing more certain can be said than that it belongs to the period of his maturity.

Nothing of this picture is in its original state except the figure of an angel to the right. This is one of the strongest and most expressive of Botticelli's angel faces, and if the whole picture once showed the imagination and the power exhibited in this figure it must certainly have deserved the praise and love which are no longer its due. For the repainting has not only obscured the outline and the

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

colour, but has also sentimentalised the faces until all the true character of Botticelli's work has disappeared. This is the way in which posterity recreates its favourites after its own liking. Different stages of Botticelli worship may well be studied in the so-called restoration of the portrait of Smeralda (Victoria and Albert Museum), the Madonna of St. Barnabas (Plate ix.), and this picture. The sick soul of Rossetti appears in the first, the distortions of feeble excess in the second, while here a ripe and full-blooded sentimentality has softened the forms and prettified the features which probably once proceeded from the strongest and most mature of Botticelli's moods.

Of course, the composition remains Botticelli's. A school copy in the Louvre, omitting the angel on the left with upstretched arm, suggests, with its more effective simplicity, an amendment due to the mind of the master himself.









## VIII

# HOLY FAMILY AND SAINTS

BERLIN, No. 106

**A**N altarpiece by Botticelli in the chapel of the Bardi in the church of San Spirito is recorded by Vasari and older authorities. It showed the Virgin and Child and St. John the Baptist, and Vasari mentions expressly the careful finish of the picture and its olives and palms which were painted 'con sommo amore.' This is the picture for which Botticelli was paid by Giovanni d'Agnolo de' Bardi seventy-five gold florins in August 1485: two for the ultramarine, thirty-eight for the gold and the gilding of the frame, and thirty-five for the painting itself. In February of the same year Botticelli's friend Giuliano da San Gallo had received twenty-four florins odd for the frame. The picture was probably executed in the interval between these dates.

The description answers sufficiently closely to the altarpiece acquired by Baron Rumohr for the Berlin Gallery in 1829. It was bought from a dealer, and is supposed to have been acquired by him from the family of the Bardi, from whose chapel Botticelli's picture was certainly removed in the seventeenth century. Vasari may easily have forgotten to mention the second figure of a Saint, St. John



## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

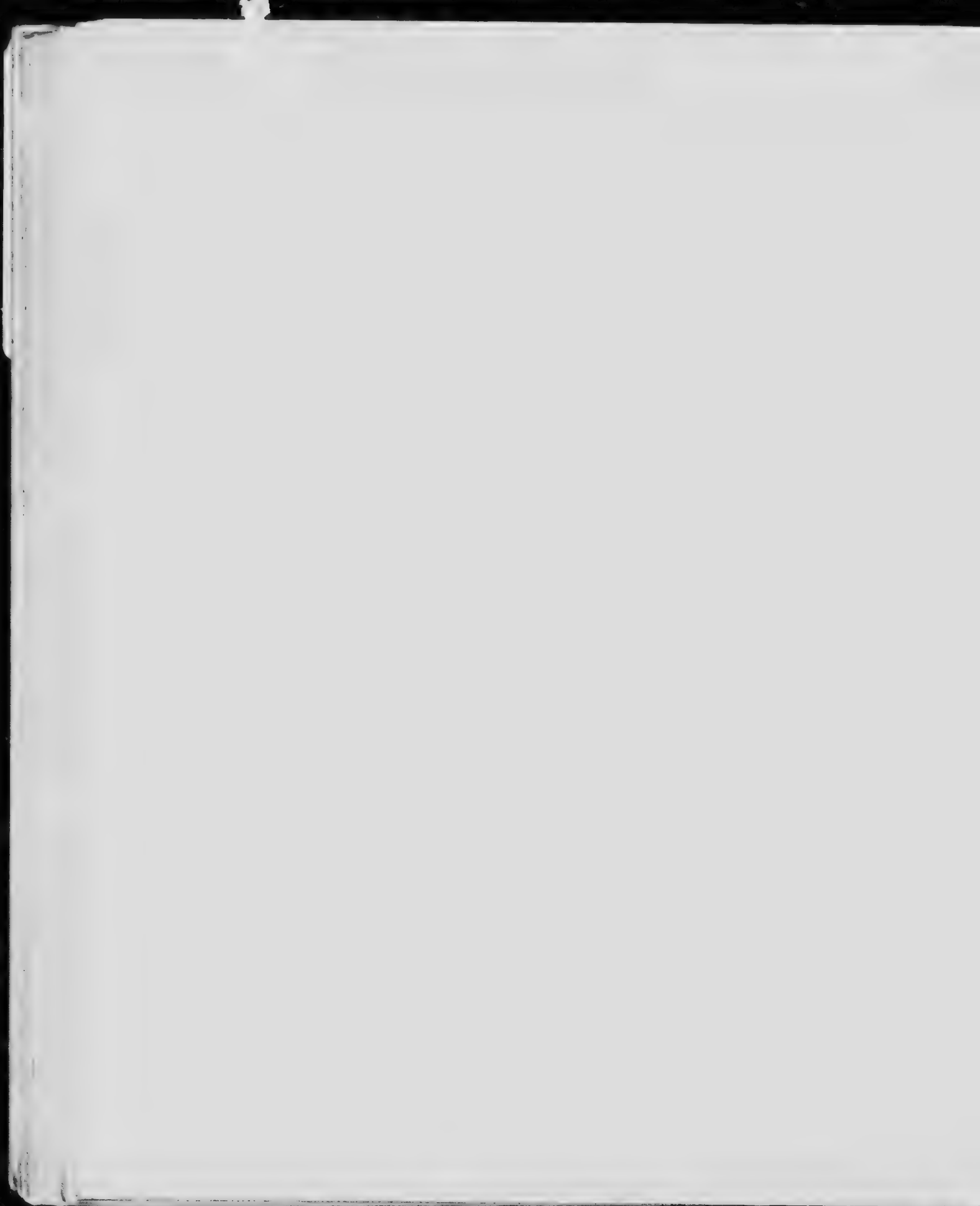
the Evangelist, and the excellent preservation of the panel permits his praise of the careful execution and of the trees to be appropriately bestowed upon this picture.

The evidence of Vasari and the other writers is all the more useful in this case because much in this unattractive picture appears at first sight strange to Botticelli. The figure most characteristic of his style is that of the Child; the painful precision of the detail and the grimness of the figures are less familiar. But it must be remembered that this is a picture painted for an orthodox and ritual purpose, and Botticelli's definite contour easily led to harshness, as is evident in the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, which are dated not long before the commission of this picture. As it is, the picture must be accepted as the most important evidence of Botticelli's ecclesiastical style on his return from Rome, and instead of this work being disregarded as unusual, more doubtful and less well preserved pictures must be tested and reconstructed in its light.

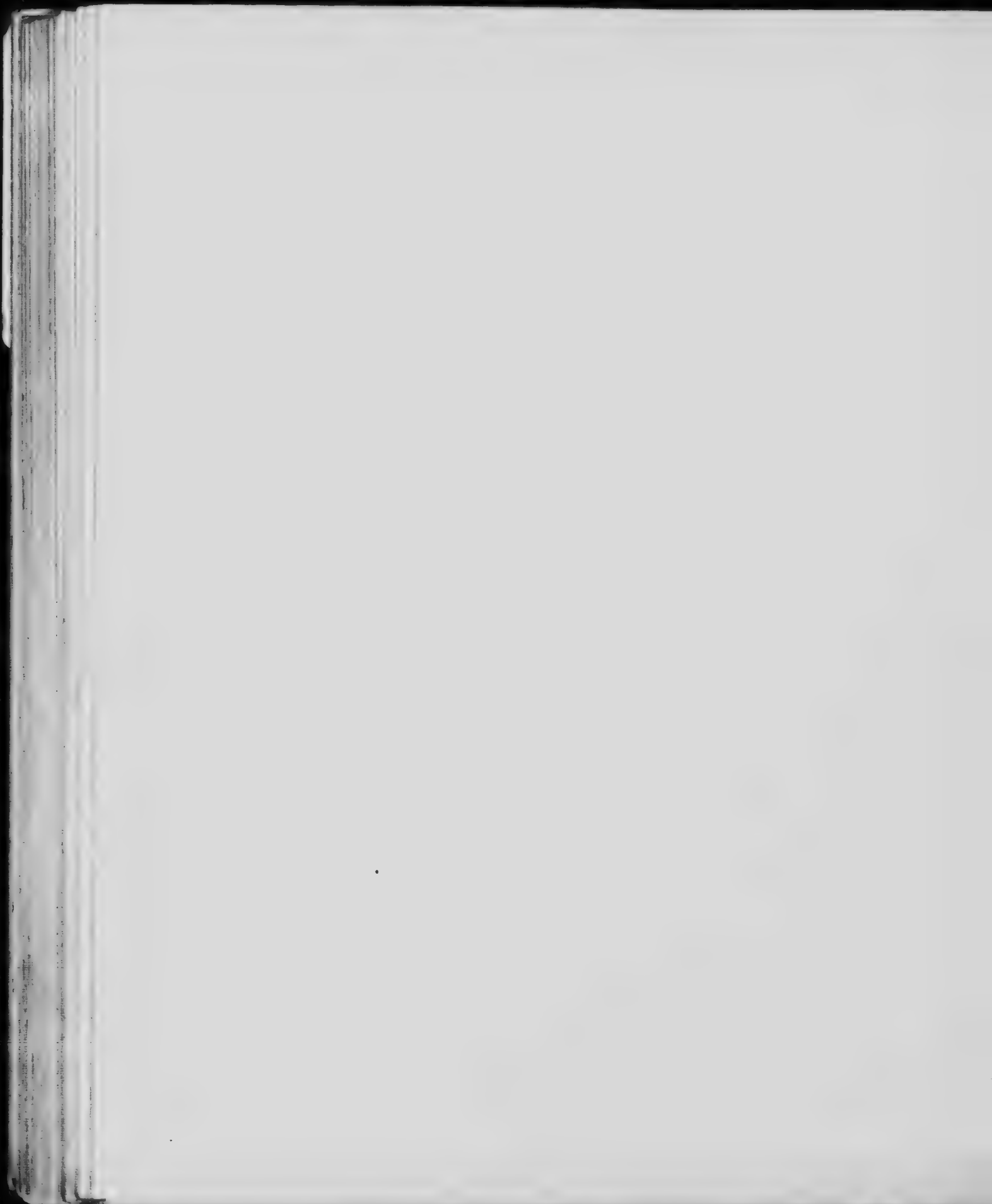
There is no record in any list or document of another picture, which is said to have come from the church of San Spirito, the *Pentecost* in Sir Frederick Cook's collection at Richmond. It is a singularly unpleasing work at first sight, ugly in colour, over-expressive in gesture, and heavy in drawing. But its monumental character, the amplitude and nobility of some of its figures, and its very exaggerations of expression suggest that it, like the finer *Lamentation* at Munich, is the counterpart on a large scale of such undoubtedly genuine but late works by Botticelli as the *San Zenobio* series. The *Lamentation* and the

## HOLY FAMILY AND SAINTS

*Pentecost* stand in relation to the *Madonnas* of the *Pomegranate* and the *Magnificat*, as do the *San Zenobio* pictures to the *Calumny* or the *Adoration* in the Uffizi. As in the case of the *Annunciation* (Plate xix.), no doubt the brush was principally applied by the hands of pupils.







## IX

VIRGIN AND CHILD WITH ANGELS  
AND SAINTS

FLORENCE, ACADEMY, No. 85

THE altarpiece by Botticelli of *The Virgin with Saint Catherine*, as the old lists call it, remained in the church of St. Barnabas until it was removed to the Academy on the suppression of the monasteries in 1808. This continuity of position has unfortunately not been accompanied by excellence of treatment. The picture has been so much repainted that practically nothing remains of its original surface and colour, and it would not be safe to attempt to analyse the drawing or to discuss the details. To reconstruct the picture it is necessary to turn to the altarpiece at Berlin (Plate VIII.), with which and the Sistine frescoes this picture is roughly contemporary. In this picture, as in the Berlin altarpiece, the character of figures and accessories alike is harsh and grim, though the angels introduce something of a more attractive humanity, akin to that of several figures in the *Temptation of Christ* in the Sistine Chapel, and come close in character to those of the *Virgins of the Magnificat* and *Pomegranate*.

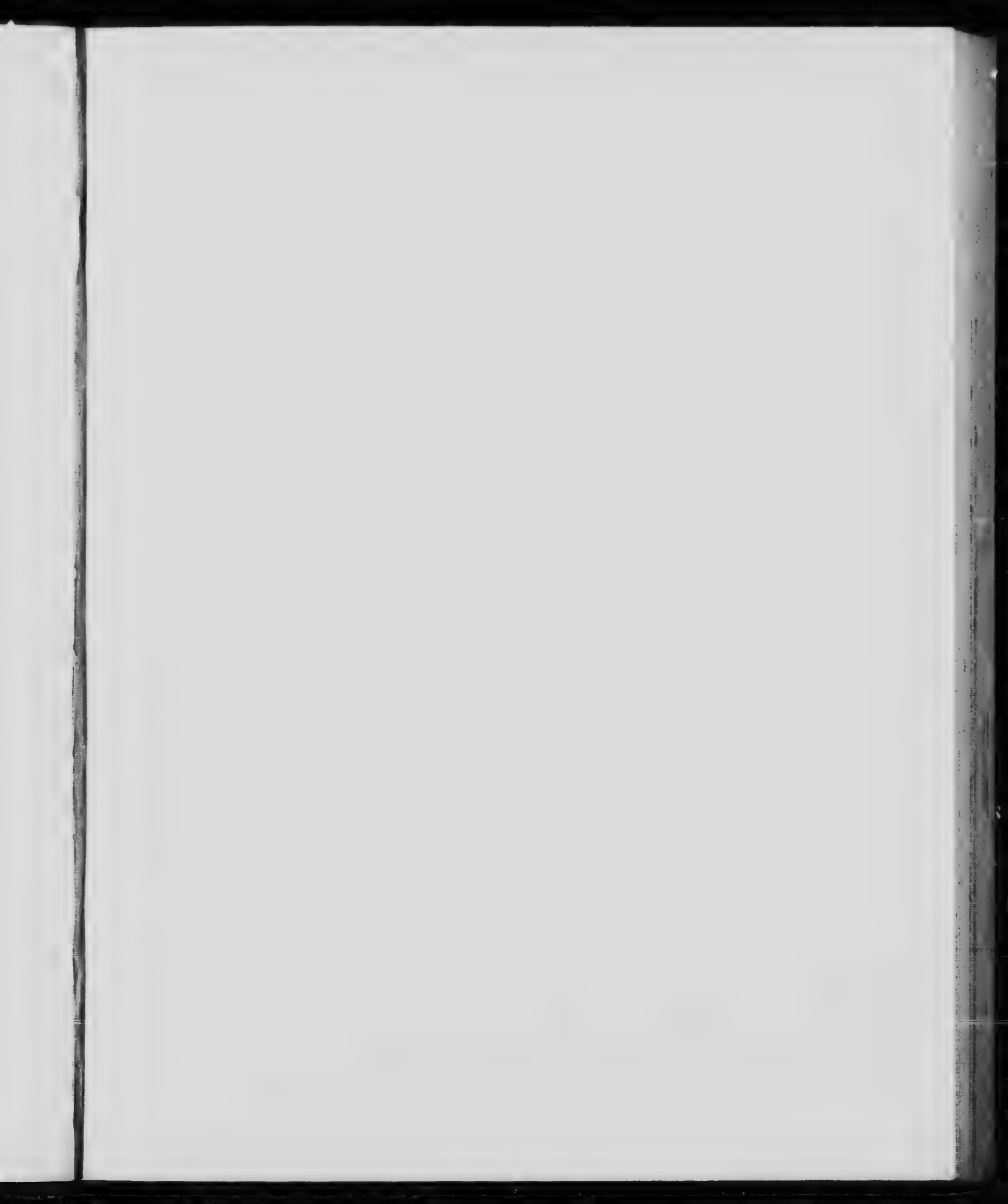
The mutilation of this picture was not confined to the

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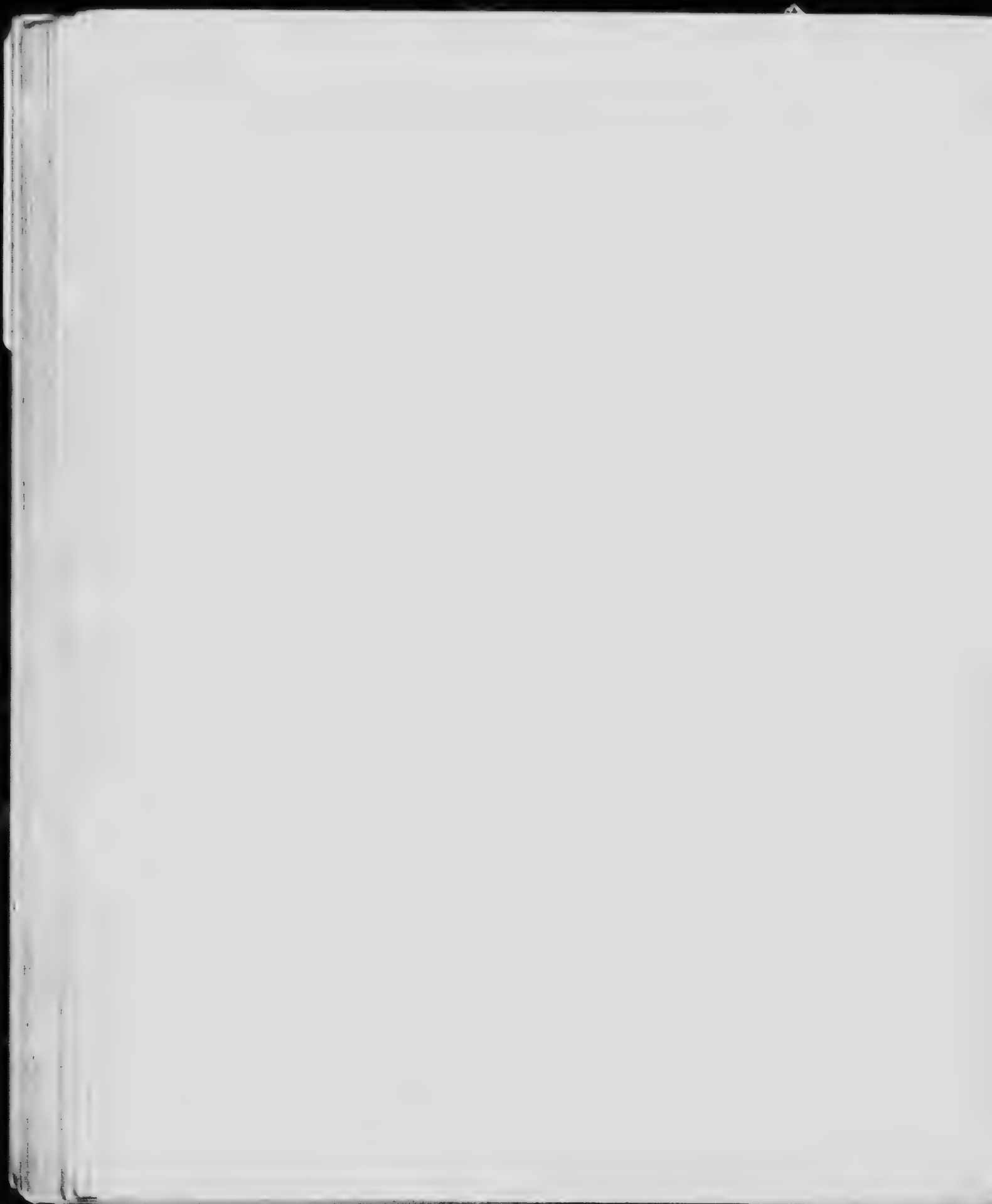
## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

repainting of its surface. To make it fit into the head of the choir, where it was removed from the high altar about 1717, it was enlarged by one Agostino Veracini, who added the entire piece of decoration which stands above the representations of round sculptured reliefs. This addition has been removed from the illustration, as it has been removed in Mr. Horne's book. Veracini also added the lowest row of marble slabs.

This altarpiece is the subject of a curious story told by G. Richa in his account of Florentine churches. The church and monastery of San Barnaba were granted in the fourteenth century to certain Augustine Canons. For them Botticelli painted the picture. But in 1522 the Prioress of the Carmelite nuns received a visit from a mysterious stranger, who told her to demand the church of San Barnaba for her order. This she did and with success. When they had obtained the church they desired, the Prioress found the portrait of her mysterious stranger in Botticelli's altarpiece. He was none other than St. Barnabas himself.











## THE VISION OF ST. AUGUSTINE

FLORENCE, ACADEMY, No. 162

**F**OUR panels of the predella to the altarpiece of San Barnaba are preserved in the Academy of Florence. These cannot be assigned with confidence to the hand of Botticelli himself, but that which shows the *Vision of St. Augustine* has the best claim to be regarded as Botticelli's own.

St. Augustine was pondering on the mystery of the Trinity as he walked on the sand by the sea. He found there a little child taking water from the sea in a little spoon and pouring it into a little hollow that he had made in the sand. 'What are you doing?' asked the Saint. The child answered that he was emptying the sea and putting all its waters into the hollow. 'Impossible,' said the Saint. 'Not more so,' replied the child, 'than your attempt to put all the great mystery and divinity of the Trinity into your small understanding.'

This charming little picture shows Botticelli in the playful and gracious mood of the many decorative panels and designs for illustrations which are associated with his immediate environment.





XI

# PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN

LONDON, NATIONAL GALLERY, No. 626

THE *Portrait of a Young Man in a Red Cap* has come to be regarded as the standard example of Botticelli's work at his best and most mature moment. Yet it is not thirty years since Dr. Richter first suggested that it might be by Botticelli, and less than fifteen since the National Gallery first allowed it to be his. Before that, it passed under the greater name of Masaccio, like the majority of fifteenth-century portraits of young men in caps, and it was bought for £108, 3s., under that name, for the National Gallery in 1859, from the collection of Lord Northwich.

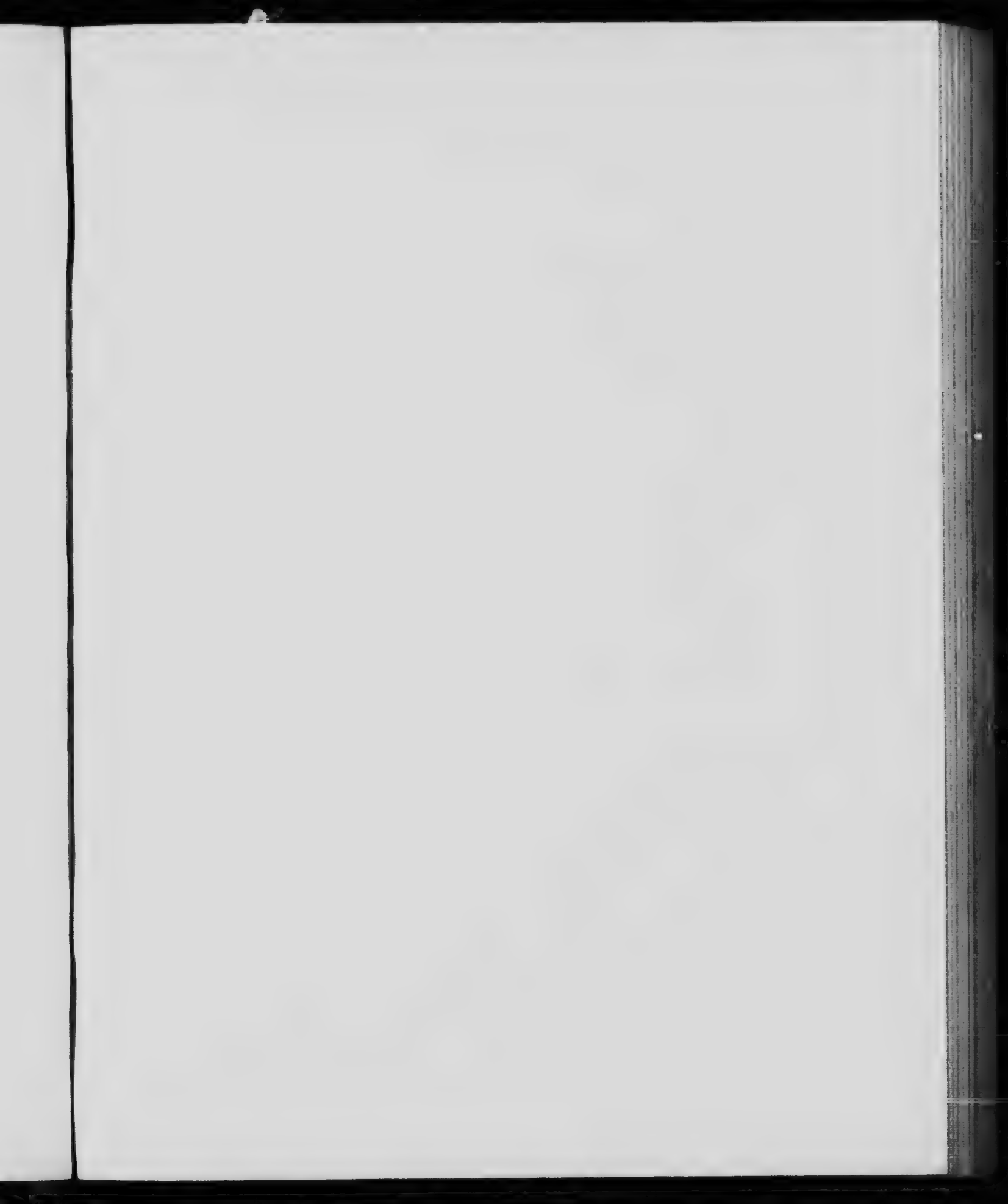
An attribution to Masaccio is not surprising when it is remembered that the different styles represented on the walls of the Brancacci Chapel were all somewhat indiscriminately associated with him. That chapel was in Vasari's eyes the school of all succeeding Florentine artists, where even Leonardo and Michelangelo learned the lesson of breadth, dignity, and realistic grandeur. These are the qualities of the simple head in this picture, as they are those of *Mars* in the adjacent picture, of the heads in the *Adoration* of Santa Maria Novella, and of sufficient other pictures

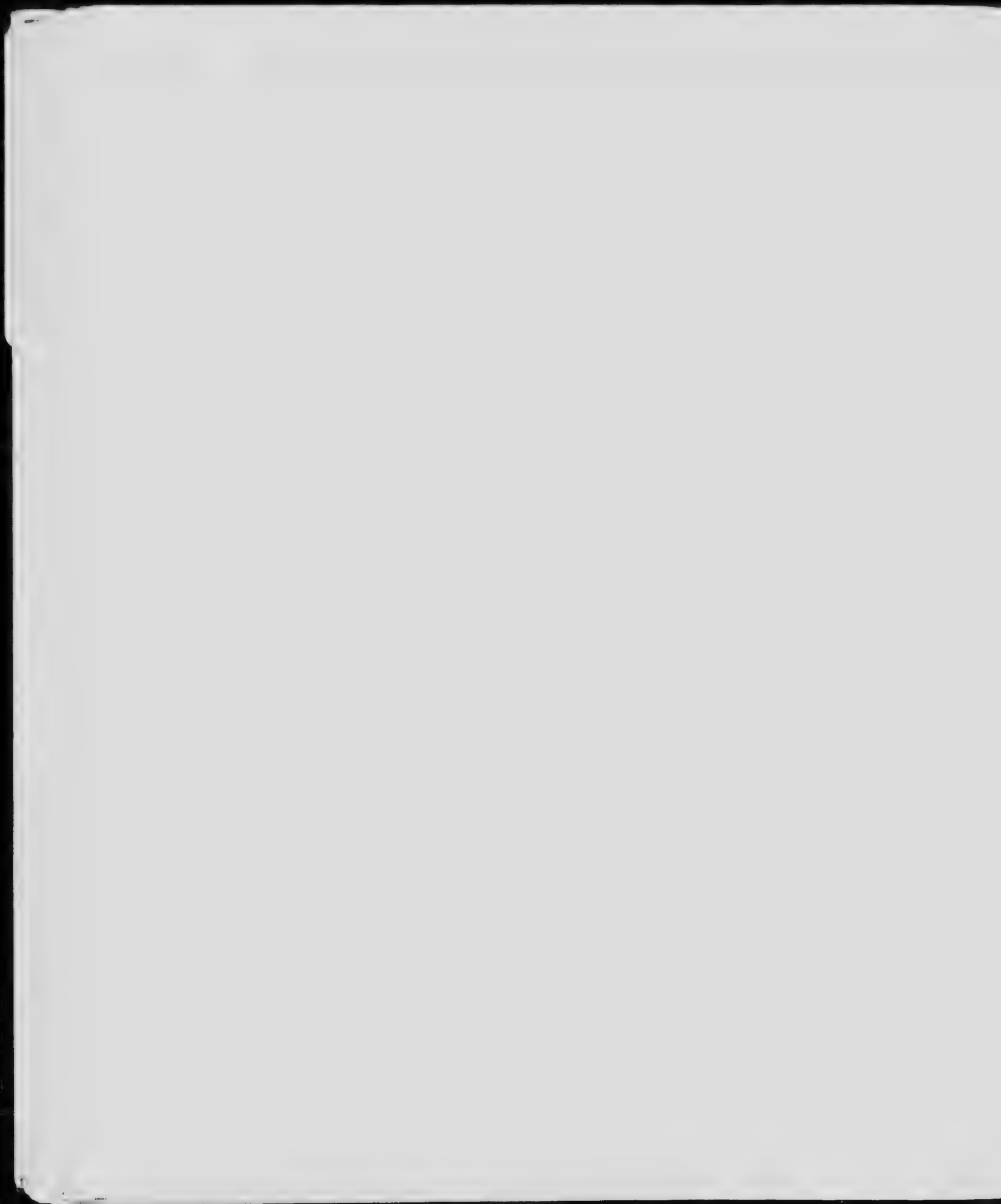
## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

to make the conjectural attribution to Botticelli practically a certainty. But these qualities in this head, and the mention of the Brancacci Chapel, call up a feeling of much surprise that the commission to complete the frescoes in that chapel which were left unfinished at Masaccio's early death was given to Botticelli's pupil, Filippino, and not to the master himself. After Botticelli's achievements in Rome some such disorder and wantonness as Vasari lays to his charge must have been the reason why he was passed over.

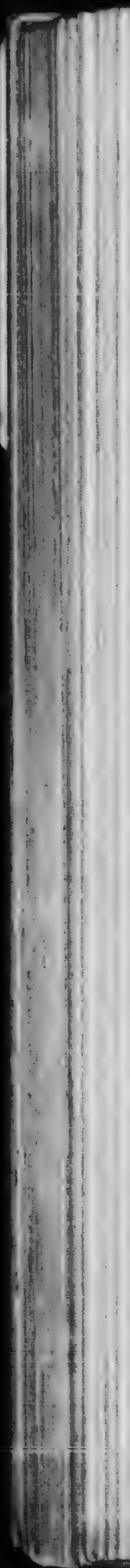
The portrait is grandly and squarely set within its frame. The head is blocked out with the utmost simplicity. There is no elaborate modelling, but the structure is represented by the firmness of the contours and the precision with which the different parts and planes are interrelated. The design is so free from any decorative excrescence that it almost seems to be bare ; but in reality its restraint is the result of the most elaborate care. The colour is cool and sober, in keeping with the design ; even the bright red hat is not rich or hot. This restraint of colour and design—far from either the uneasy animation of the Uffizi portrait (Plate II.) or the exaggerated restlessness of later school works (Plate XXIV.)—is the strongest and most effective setting to the wealth of subtle character which Botticelli saw and represented in the features of this face.











## XII

# MARS AND VENUS

LONDON, NATIONAL GALLERY, No. 915

**A** PICTURESQUE interpretation has been put upon the subject of the *Mars and Venus* by Dr. J. P. Richter. It connects the picture with an incident in the history of the Medici which became romance almost as soon as it was enacted. Giuliano, the brother of Lorenzo the Magnificent, was the victor in the tournament of 1475, which, though an annual affair, was no doubt conducted with special elaborateness on this occasion. Giuliano wore the favour, according to the rules of the game, of the young Simonetta Cattaneo, the wife of Marco Vespucci. So far the incident contains no very remarkable features. But in less than a year Simonetta fell ill and died, and scarcely two years later Giuliano was murdered. Poetry, in the form of the young Politian, became busy. He had not finished his stanzas in celebration of the jousts when he was compelled to write elegies upon their heroine. It is as an illustration to the poem on the jousts that Dr. Richter explains the picture, for in it Giuliano has a dream, and a lady (Simonetta) appears to him as Pallas calling him to glory, until a goddess arrives, divests her of her armour, and leaves her clothed in white.

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

Dr. Richter supposes this picture to be a synopsis of the poem, and, while he allows that the male figure is not a portrait of Giuliano, he finds in the female the only representation of Simonetta.

Of course the picture does not bear this interpretation. Ignorant apparently of the Triton's conch, Dr. Richter ridicules the idea that the little satyr is trying to rouse the sleeper by means of 'a shell with its murmuring sound.' If Botticelli had a poem in view, surely that poem would explain the hornet's nest above the head of the man, and it is strange to find the cuirass of which Pallas has been divested lying under the dreamer and not by her side. If the picture did not fail to support this interpretation it would be necessary to date it, as does Dr. Richter, before 1476. But unless, as Vasari seems to think, all Botticelli's successful pictures were painted before he went to Rome, everything in this picture points to a date so much posterior to 1475 that it cannot be conceived to illustrate this incident. As for the fancied portrait of Simonetta, there is no ground whatever for supposing that if the man is ideal, this figure, which recurs elsewhere alone as Venus, is meant to possess the features of a real person.

The picture, then, must be accepted as simply representing Mars and Venus, a subject often chosen in decorative panels such as the size of this shows it to be. In date, Mr. Horne would place it close to the Bardi altarpiece of 1484 upon the evidence of 'the quality and accent of its draughtsmanship.' If this is right—and almost the whole

## MARS AND VENUS

of Mr. Horne's chronology depends upon it—Botticelli's return to Florence from Rome was marked by a revival of the sanity, strength, and decorative restraint which he had shown in his *Adoration*, together with an enlarged sense of composition which he may have gained in Rome, though he failed to exhibit it in the Sistine frescoes. At any rate, whenever it was executed, this picture is Botticelli's masterpiece of intentional linear decoration, while the drapery of the Venus and the drawing of the Mars show his highest power of selection and representation. Maturer than the *Spring*, less mannered than the *Birth of Venus*, this picture is the touchstone of his capacities in designing few figures on a large scale and with simple colouring, as the *Adoration* and the *Calumny* are the finest examples of his more richly coloured multitudes in miniature.







XIII

GIOVANNA TORNABUONI WITH  
VENUS AND THE GRACES

PARIS, LOUVRE, No. 1297

**T**HE two frescoes at the Louvre, sometimes called 'The Frescoes of the Villa Lemmi,' from the name of the villa near Florence whence they were removed to Paris, were discovered in 1873. There is no record of them in any author, but they were at once recognised as the work of Botticelli, and the principal figures can be identified as the portraits of Lorenzo Tornabuoni and his wife Giovanna, the sometime owners of the villa. The two frescoes, with at least one other, formed the decoration of a room on the first floor of the villa, and the plinth and pilasters in the foreground of each show that they were intended to represent a real opening from the room into the world outside.

Lorenzo and Giovanna Tornabuoni were married in 1486. The Tornabuoni were a noble family, enjoying the special patronage of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Both husband and wife were celebrated for their beauty and for every virtue. But they were ill fated. Giovanna died two years after she was married, and some ten years later

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

Lorenzo was put to death by the party of Savonarola on the charge of conspiring to restore the exiled son of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

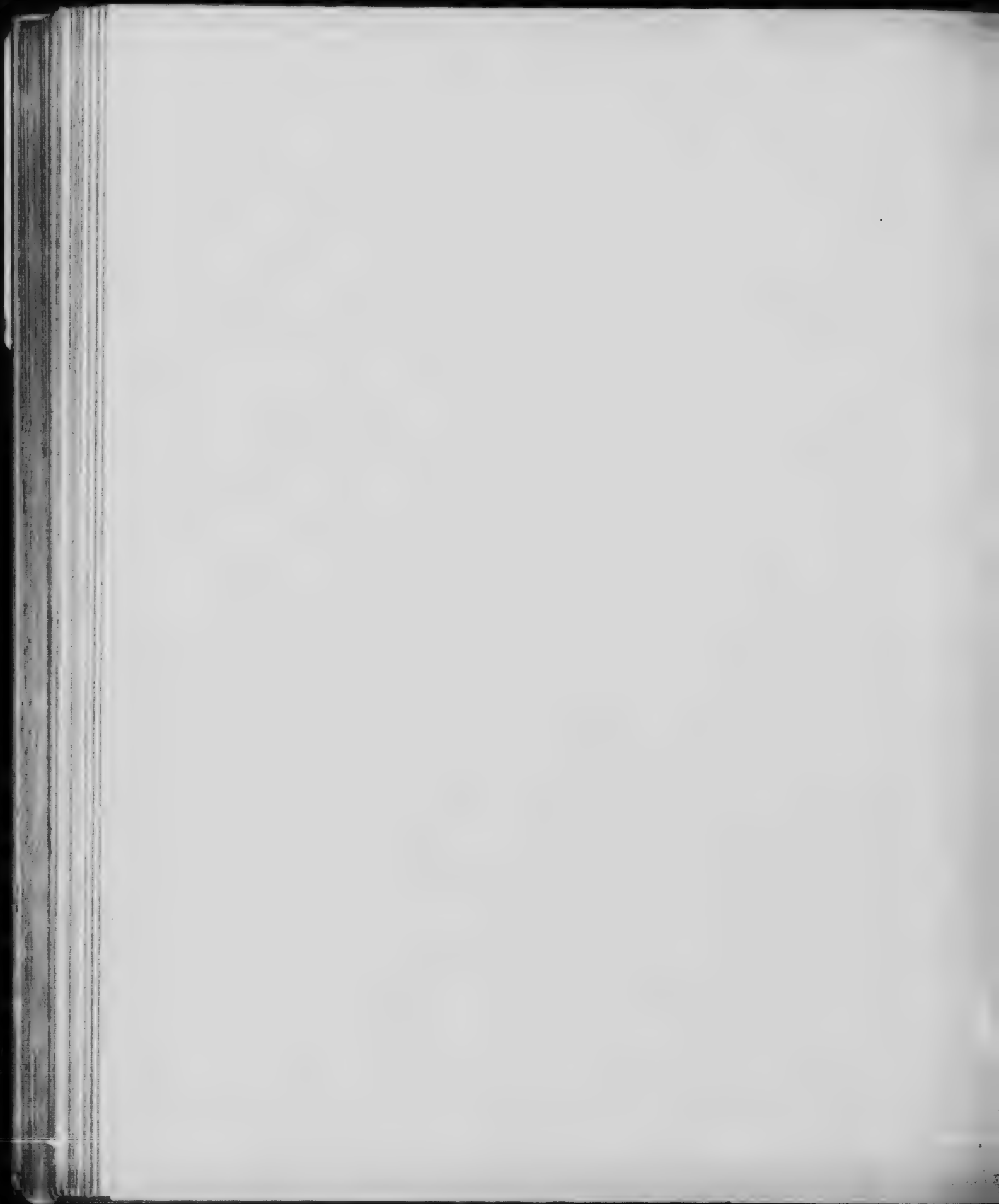
The frescoes by Ghirlandaio in Santa Maria Novella represent Lorenzo and Giovanna as characters in holy story. Botticelli surrounds them in their own villa with allegory. Lorenzo as the learned pupil of Politian is being led by a figure, which probably represents Grammar, into the circle of the Seven Arts. Giovanna, gazing upwards, holds out a cloth into which Venus appears to drop flowers as she approaches with her accompanying Graces. One of the frescoes is somewhat severe, as befits a solemn imagery, while the other is gay with rounded, laughing lines. But in both the prominent figures are the two portraits, which stand, strong and dignified, away from the allegorical groups.

Of course the coverings of whitewash and removal from the walls have brought these figures almost into ruin. So much of them, also, was painted in tempera after the plaster had dried, that even less remains than would have been the case had they been completed in true fresco. There may well be, besides, no little of assistants' handwork in their execution. But even so they are among the most attractive remains of Botticelli's work; the Lorenzo for its cunning grouping of archaistic figures, the Giovanna for its frolicsome colour and movement, and both for the masterly dignity of the portrait figures and the broad treatment of their heads. In the fresco of Giovanna it is necessary to note well the restrained lines of the soberly

## GIOVANNA TORNABUONI

clad figure, the long subtle sweep of the dress, the arms, the neck, and her steady posture, and to contrast them with the uneasy and bustling movements and draperies of the Graces and Venus, which are the characteristics more usually associated with the idea of Botticelli.





#### XIV

### PORTRAIT OF A LADY

FLORENCE, PITTI

THE portrait of a woman in profile in the Pitti Palace, sometimes identified with a portrait of Simonetta Vespucci which Vasari believed Botticelli to have painted, has been cast from the list of Botticelli's works by almost all critics of authority. They appear to be influenced almost entirely by their personal taste, which is offended by the fancied ugliness of the picture. But even Mr. Horne, who discerns its beauty, refuses to accept the authenticity of the work, although he recognises as a certainty that it belongs to the circle of the master.

Yet the picture bears numerous signs of authenticity. It is an act of daring in itself, such as is not to be expected from a pupil, least of all from the pupils of Botticelli, to represent a woman who is not beautiful, in the conventional sense, in the simplest and plainest of garments and against the severest of backgrounds. There are numerous portraits which show how the circle of Botticelli decked out the head with frills and jewels and extravagances of every type, distorted the features into conventional grimaces, and covered the painting with gaudiness of

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

colour. Here, on the contrary, nothing extraneous is introduced. The painter trusts entirely to the subtle characterisation of the face and to the still subtler beauty of sober colouring and of strong and simple lines and rare restraint of ornament. How much care has been expended on the precise tracing of the lines appears from the 'pentimenti,' the corrections, with which parts of the outline are surrounded.

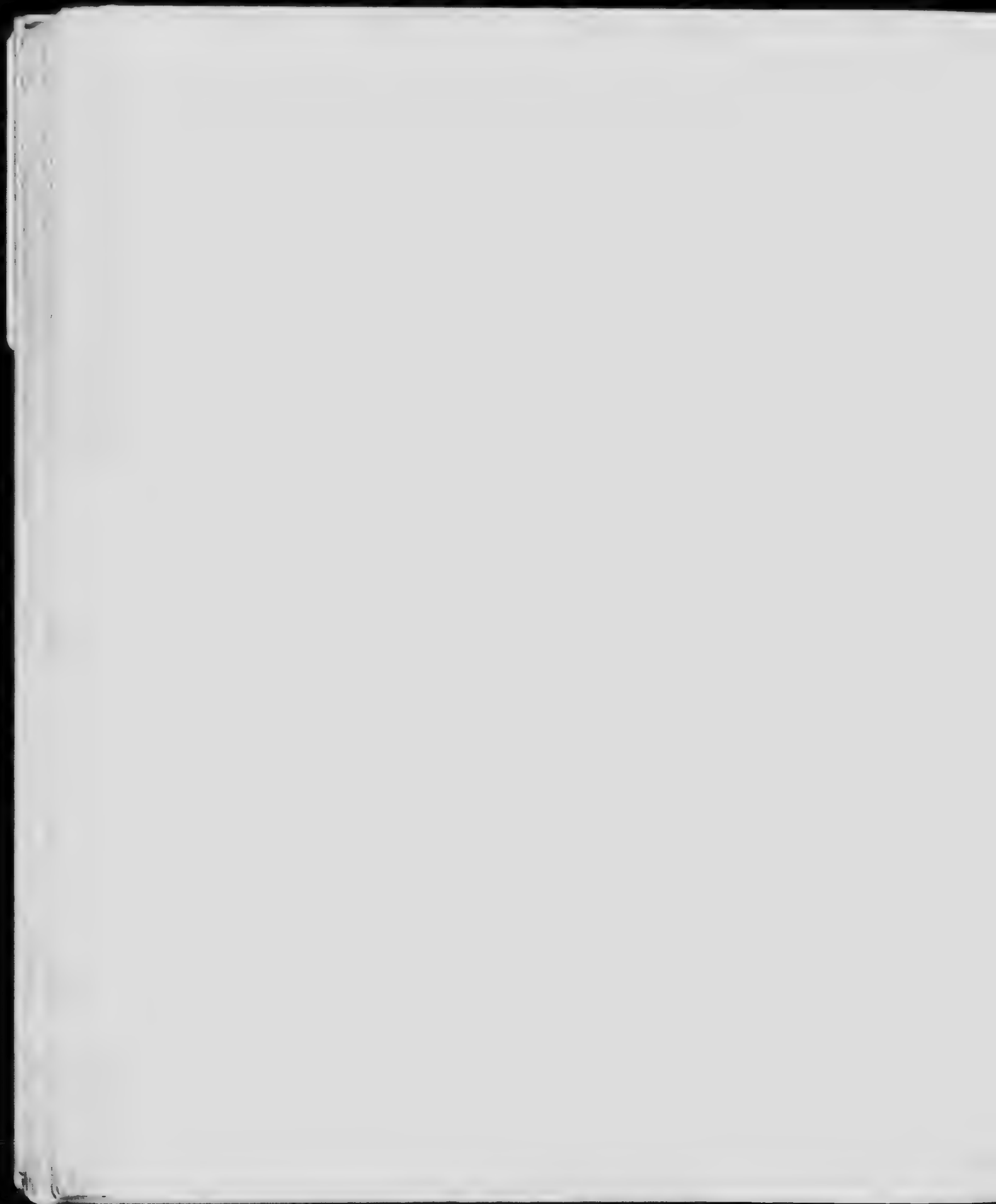
That the painter who saw this beauty and troubled to reproduce it with such care was Botticelli himself should not appear surprising after close consideration of his other pictures. The portrait has not the bold play of structure possessed by the *Man in the Red Cap* (Plate XI.). Such forcible modelling is not universal in Botticelli's work, and here it would ill have suited the subject. But the careful and restrained design is common to both pictures. The long flat lines are very close to those in the figure of Giovanna Tornabuoni, even the colours of the dresses are similar, and there is in each an ornament around the neck serving precisely the same purpose. The arms recall Giovanna's, though the attitude is not the same. But the attitude is all but identical with that which Botticelli gives to himself in his own portrait in the *Adoration* (Plate VI.), and there, too, the hands are hidden and the dress is heavy and brown.

These are small indications which might be indefinitely extended by an analysis of the drapery, the hair, and the carefully painted, hard background with its incised lines; but they are all such characteristics as might

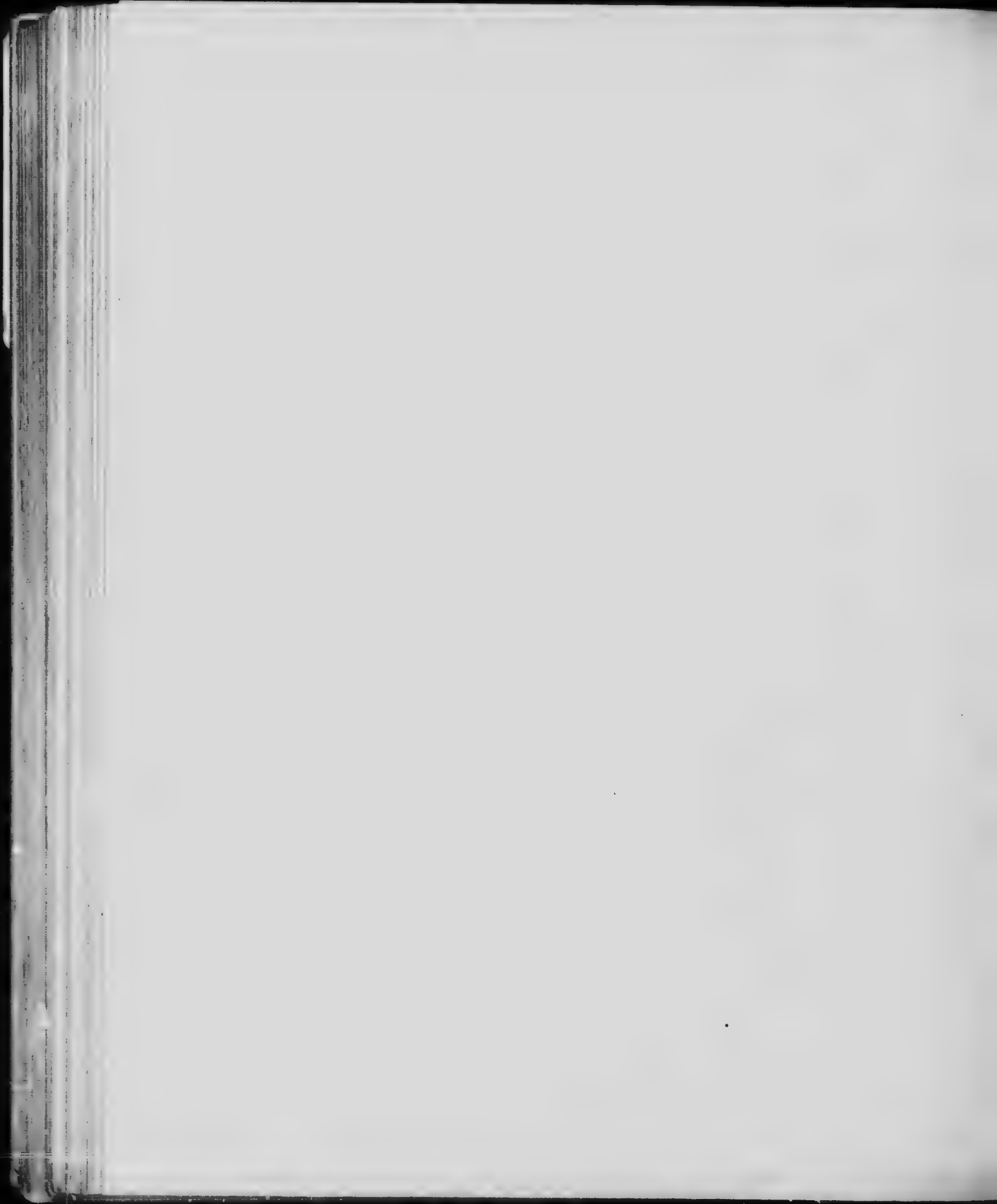


## PORTRAIT OF A LADY

be caught by a pupil. The more important indications of the authorship are the strength and precision of the contour, which as a rule are accepted as proof of the master's hand, and the general beauty of the design. Exactly as in the *Mars and Venus*, the definite contour makes a beautiful and careful pattern. The curves are consciously contrasted with straight lines and the masses are deliberately composed in broad and simple fields. The result is an exquisite plainness, most characteristic of Botticelli's strength.







## THE BIRTH OF VENUS

FLORENCE, UFFIZI, No. 39

THE history of the *Birth of Venus* is told under the head of the *Spring* (Plate v.). When the two pictures were brought to the Uffizi the *Birth* obtained immediate exhibition, and it remained in that Gallery when the *Spring* was transferred to the Academy. This was not the first time that they were divided, for in 1598 they were in different rooms in the Grand Duke's villa at Castello, and there is nothing to show that they were originally designed for the same room. The dimensions do not correspond, and while the *Spring* is painted on panel the *Birth of Venus* is on canvas.

Unlike the *Spring*, the *Birth of Venus* has an immediately intelligible subject. The winds, in whom it is impossible not to recognise the Zephyr and the figure called the Spring in the other picture, waft Venus on her shell to land. One attendant receives her. Vasari's accuracy of description may be judged from his mention of the 'Amori' who accompanied Venus in this picture.

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

The subject may be traced to a poem by Poliziano; the only matter of doubt being the exact affiliation of the attitude of Venus to the poem or to such a representation of the 'Medici' Venus or its type as Botticelli may have known.

Mr. Horne's detailed examination of the picture leads him to the conclusion that it was painted after Botticelli's return from Rome and considerably later than the *Spring*. Exception must be taken to the argument that the tilt of Venus's body, which is intended to give a sense of forward motion, is a sign of comparatively late work, for the tilt is here hardly evident in comparison with later works and is almost as noticeable, and has the same intention, in at least one of the Graces and in the Venus of the *Spring*. Nor can the gilding be used as an argument, since it is quite certain that the *Spring* showed originally far more gold than it does now.

The condition of the picture is good. The face of Venus seems to have suffered considerably from over-cleaning. Her right arm has been repainted, as Mr. Horne notes. The same writer finds signs of the work of assistants in some of the drapery. The whole figure of the attendant in which these signs occur and her pose are inferior in conception and execution to the rest. The cadaverous colour of the picture which Walter Pater enumerated as one of the characteristics of Botticelli's art, is due to the deterioration of the paint.

The *Birth of Venus* ranked as one of the pictures of 'nude women' for which Botticelli became famous.

## BIRTH OF VENUS

Copies of the central figure, of contemporary date, exist, but none are due to Botticelli's hand, and if this innocent conception of nudity had been followed by other artists Savonarola's bonfires might have lost some of their material.







## CALUMNY

FLORENCE, UFFIZI

VASARI speaks of Botticelli as engaged upon a commentary on Dante. He means thereby a series of illustrations, and the literalness to the text which was then demanded of illustration is almost tantamount to commentary. In the *Calumny* he comments upon a passage of Lucian, retranslating into the language of the eye the description given by the author of a picture by Apelles. This description was made generally known to the public by a free rendering contained in the book *De Pictura* by Leon Battista Alberti. The passage was illustrated by many painters, and, with the exception of one small detail, is closely followed by Botticelli, even where, as in the description of Calumny and Remorse, the translator wanders far from the original.

Apelles is said to have painted this subject to celebrate his victory over a slander which was brought against him at the Court of Ptolemy Philopater. On the extreme right sits the nameless judge. Ignorance and Suspicion stand by him. His enormous ears are mentioned by Lucian and Alberti, but neither of these authors is responsible for the idea that Ignorance and Suspicion are

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

stretching his ears wide to welcome the slander. Calumny approaches his throne with a torch in one hand; with the other she drags a man who lifts his hands in an appeal to the gods for mercy. The pale, ragged wretch who precedes Calumny is Envy; the two women engaged in decking her headdress are Treachery and Deceit. Away from these figures, on the left side of the picture, stand Remorse, clad in rags, and the modest figure of Truth.

The action takes place in a large, open court. The architecture is enriched with every kind of sculptured device and is covered with gold. No landscape could do aught to equal this luxuriance, and therefore Botticelli introduces through an opening a vista of the sea. The painting of the picture is rich and careful as a miniature, the colouring brilliant. It is to such an extent a feast of fancy and detail that the mind asks for no explanation of the subject nor feels the lack of concentrated drama in this simple narrative.

The care in the drawing both of the chief figures and the most minute accessory, the absence of mannered faces, and the comparative restraint of the drapery and the poses make it impossible to place the picture as late in the series of Botticelli's works as does Mr. Horne. 'Truth' is the own sister to 'Venus' and, if anything, less mannered. Certainly there is violent action, but it is far from taking the exaggerated and ugly form which belongs to such pictures as the *San Zenobio* series, the *Lucretia*, or the *Virginia*. The *Nativity* shows Mr. Horne to be right in placing these at the end of Botti-

## CALUMNY

celli's career. But in the *Calumny* there is even less violence and ugliness, less of the body thrown forward from the hips, than in the Sistine frescoes. It would seem that Mr. Horne stretches his point in order to arrive at a late date for the Dante drawings, which have many characteristics in common with the *Calumny*.

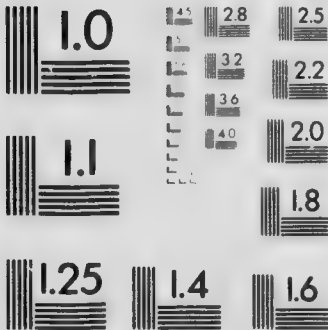
The picture is admirably preserved. It has suffered little since Vasari saw it in the collection of Fabio Segni and compared it with the *Adoration* of the Uffizi. Probably Fabio inherited it from his father, Antonio, who was known to Vasari as a friend and patron to Leonardo.





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## PALLAS AND THE CENTAUR

FLORENCE, PITTI PALACE (ROYAL APARTMENTS)

THE picture of *Pallas and the Centaur* is the latest among the discoveries of Botticelli's pictures. It only became known to this generation in 1895 when Mr. William Spence found it in a corridor of the Royal Apartments of the Pitti Palace; since that date it has been cleaned and considerably restored and is now adequately hung in one of the state chambers. But it can scarcely be described as quite unknown until 1895, for it was hung in the gallery of the Pitti Palace nearly sixty years before, and it was then engraved.

The subject can be identified with the description of a picture belonging to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco Medici, and after his death to his nephew, Giovanni delle Bande Nere. Giovanni seems to have taken it to the villa at Castello which had also belonged to his uncle, and there it found company in the *Birth of Venus* and the *Spring*.

As in the case of the other two paintings which were once in the villa at Castello, the *Pallas* has been supposed to have been painted for Lorenzo the Magnificent. Botticelli is recorded by Vasari to have painted for him a figure of Pallas above flaming branches, and in the sale list of

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

Lorenzo's goods this picture is also ascribed to Botticelli. Possibly there is a confusion here with the standard with this device which Verocchio painted for the famous tourney of Giuliano, the brother of Lorenzo ; but, if not, Botticelli painted two pictures of Pallas, for the one now existing is certainly not to be identified with the picture once in the collection of Lorenzo.

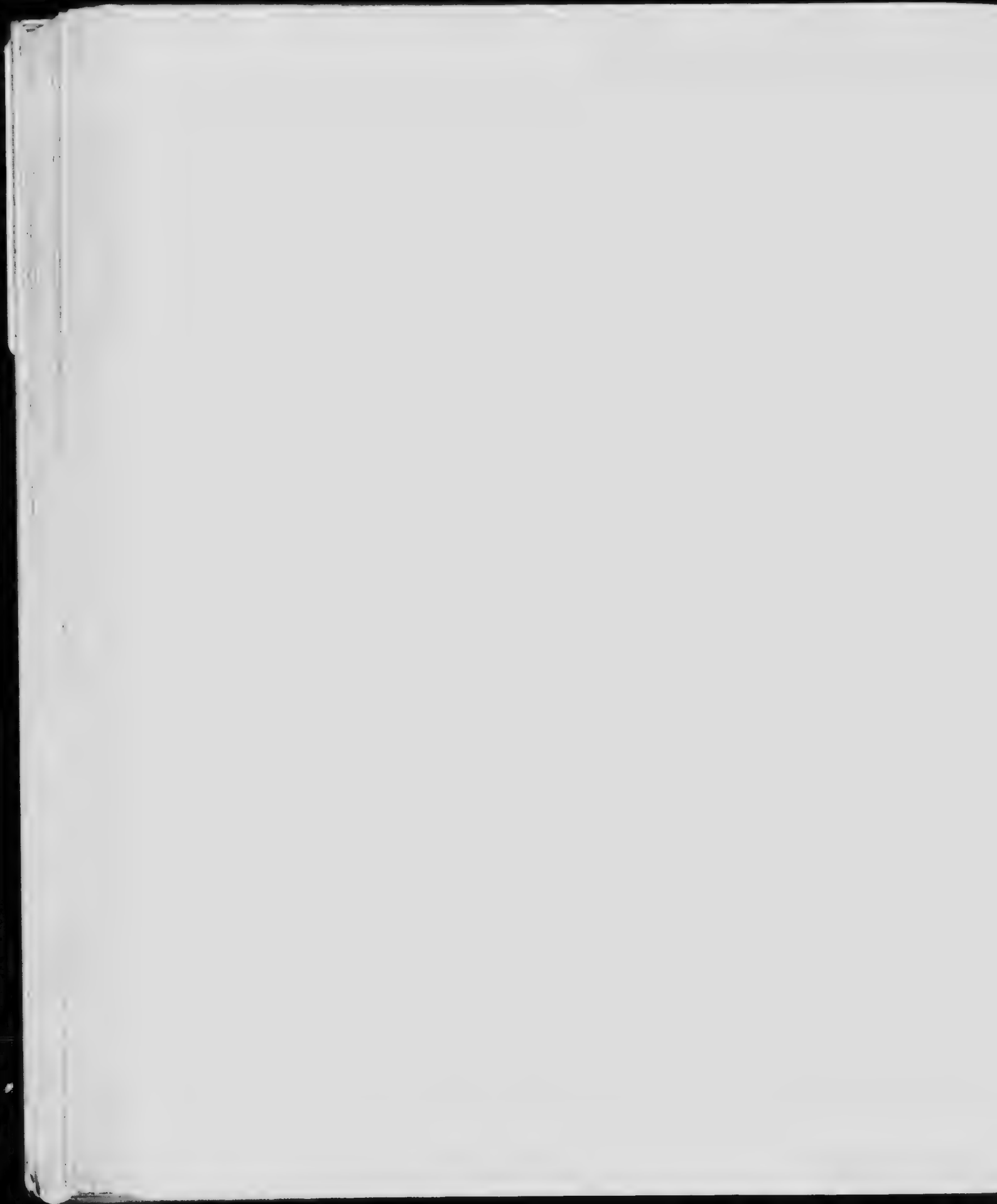
This picture is an allegory which is closely connected with the Medici. No doubt the figure of Pallas has some allusion to the device chosen by Giuliano, though the branches of olive are without their flames and Pallas is here represented in the robes of peace, without her Medusa-shield. The interlaced diamond-pointed rings upon her dress form one of the devices used by Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici. The most plausible interpretation of the subject is that it represents the wisdom and strength of the Medici subduing the lawless passions of their enemies.

The rich repertory of Botticellian designs, the painted sculptures in the *Calumny*, contains a version of this subject. Hence it is possible to conclude that it is borrowed from some antique gem or relief. Yet, except that the figures are ample enough to fill the space, there is not much that is classic in the picture. It is loosely composed and the weakness of the posture of Pallas deprives the picture of dignity. Her lack of equilibrium and her extravagant drapery are in marked contrast to the more definite contours and more precise pattern of the Centaur, as her impassive and expressionless face is in contrast with his appealing look. With these contradictions of style it

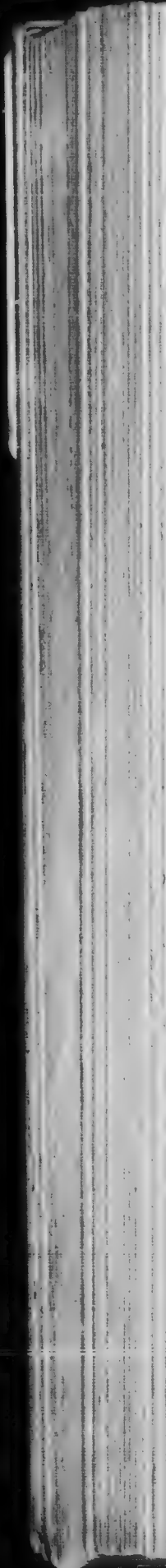
## PALLAS AND THE CENTAUR

is not easy to assign the picture to its place in Botticelli's work, nor does the subdued colour help; but Mr. Horne is probably right in arguing a late date from the peculiarities in the figure of Pallas. Not a little in the careful painting of the rocks and the Centaur, and even the faults of Pallas, recall the Dante drawings. Her face and figure appear to have been freely repainted.

Botticelli or one of his pupils treated this subject yet again, for a tapestry belongs to the Comte de Baudreuil in which Pallas with different dress and accoutrements stands in the same attitude as in the picture. A drawing for this figure is in the collection of the Uffizi.







# XVIII

## THE MADONNA OF THE POMEGRANATE

FLORENCE, UFFIZI, No. 1289

OF the many *tondi* proceeding from Botticelli or his workshop, Mr. Horne is right in choosing the *Madonna of the Pomegranate* as the only one which now adequately represents the spirit of Botticelli in its fullness. With one exception the others are either ill preserved or are marked by faultiness of execution which suggests more than the co-operation of pupils. The one exception is the little picture in the Ambrosiana (Plate xx.), but it is too slight to challenge the *Pomegranate* as a full exhibition of Botticelli's meaning and power.

Unfortunately nothing whatever is known of the date of this picture or the commission to which it is due. Mr. Horne conjecturally dates it in the year 1487, but this is only an inference from a general theory of the progress of Botticelli's style. Certainly the strength and amplitude of the forms and the bold simplicity of the design suggest the period of Botticelli's full maturity, and the diminutive head of the *Madonna* together with the widely set eyes of one of the angels are characteristic of the mannerisms which showed themselves very fully in the Sistine frescoes, but

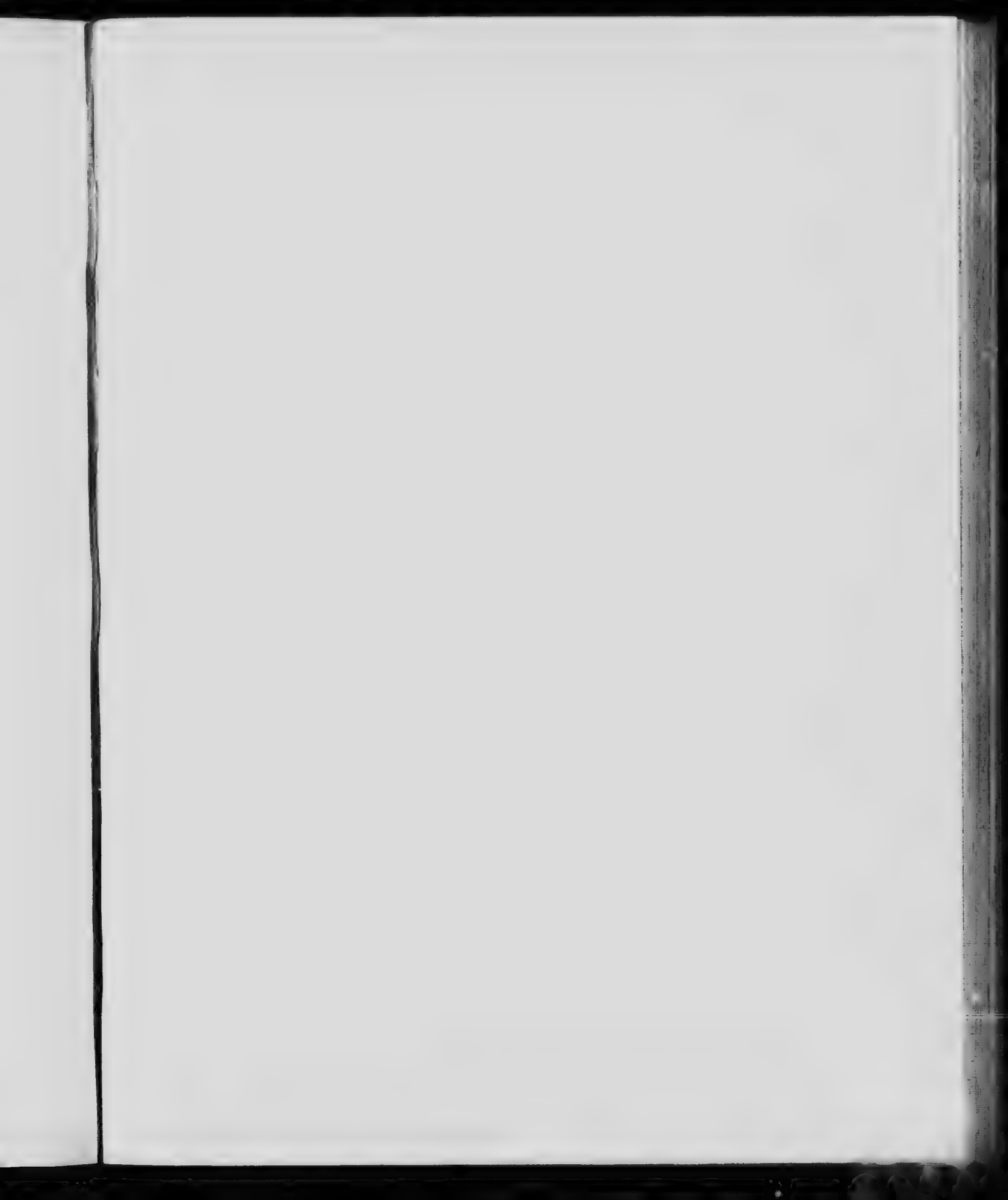
## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

occur to a less extent in such pictures as the *Birth of Venus* which are dated by internal evidence after his return from Rome.

Allowing for its better state of preservation the head of the Madonna is, both in its features and its inclination, very close to that of Venus in the *Birth*. It reappears on a smaller scale in the figure of Truth in the *Calumny*. The mind is tempted to dwell on this similarity and on such points of difference as are observed; but such analyses are dangerous, since too much depends upon minute accidents of preservation or decay, and much of the character of the expression depends on the angle at which the face is observed. Here, the head of the Madonna looks at its best, and is structurally the soundest, when seen from the right hand. From that side, too, the circle of angels appears to have most movement, and the experiment appears most successful of suggesting with a few large figures the choir of dancing angels who surround the *Madonna* in other pictures.

The gold which once poured from the glory above has to some extent been rubbed away, and the colour appears flatter and darker than it was originally. But its strong blues, browns, and reds are harmonious and luminous and in every way more characteristic of the painter than the repainted colours in the adjacent picture of the *Magnificat*.











## XIX

# THE ANNUNCIATION

FLORENCE, UFFIZI, No. 1316

**I**T has long been known that Botticelli painted an altarpiece of the Annunciation for the church of the Cestello in Florence, when from 1480 onwards the monks sought contributions from the pious for the rebuilding of their ancient cell. Among those who responded by building their own chapels was one Benedetto di Ser Giovanni Guardi, who, in 1488-1490, spent fifty ducats in building the chapel and thirty more for an altarpiece by Botticelli.

In the seventeenth century the church of the Cestello was transferred to the cult of Santa Maria Maddelena de' Pazzi and the building to some extent transformed. Botticelli's altarpiece is mentioned as remaining in the Guardi Chapel at any rate until the second half of the eighteenth century. It was then forced to make way for more modern decorations and was lost to sight. In 1872 it reappeared in a little chapel in the middle of a field which had once belonged to the nuns of Santa Maria Maddelena de' Pazzi. The picture scarcely needs the evidence of its original frame, marked with the arms of the donor, to establish its identity.

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

This picture has been much cried down. Certainly its colour is somewhat crude and staring, its cold background of grey stone contrasts uncomfortably with the bright patches of colouring in the floor and dresses. Certainly, too, the woodenness of the hands and the unelastic carriage of the heads, and the want of grandeur and strength in the draperies could not be ascribed with any plausibility to the execution of Botticelli himself. Some pupil no doubt earned part of the thirty ducats, Botticelli himself supplying the design and supervising the whole.

It is unfortunate that the drawing is unequal to the conception and the design. But as it is the picture has great virtues. As Mr. Horne points out, the Virgin and the Archangel are closely modelled on those of Filippo Lippi's charming altarpiece in San Lorenzo. But the greater simplicity of Botticelli's conception makes this a more impressive, if a less pleasing, picture. The two figures absorb the whole imagination, and there is no need for accessory fancies in figure or in background. The Madonna is grave, noble, and dignified, less naturalistic than Filippo's, and without a touch of morbidity, of archness, or fantasy. The figure of the Archangel is somewhat tricked out with unnecessary draperies; but this is the only mark of decorative luxuriance in one of the most direct and austere of Botticelli's designs. The lack of pleasant colouring is perhaps due to a pupil's hand in the first place, but some consciousness that pleasant colour was not required for the communication of the idea may have been the reason why Botticelli allowed the pupil's

## THE ANNUNCIATION

work with all its faults to pass out of his studio as his own.

The picture, in spite of its adventures, is very well preserved. It has escaped the usual fate of being varnished, and perhaps for this reason some of its faults are more noticeable than they might otherwise be.







XX

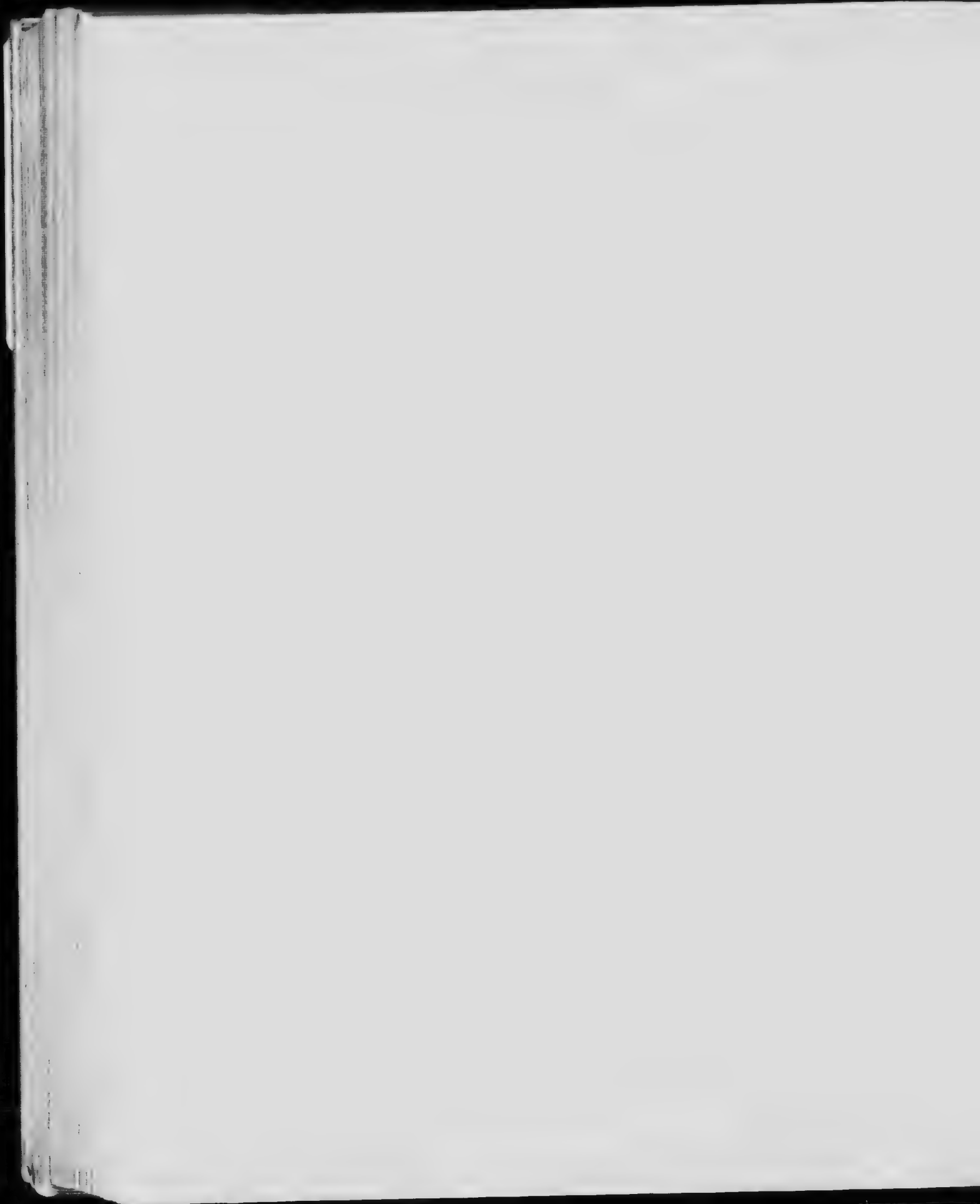
THE VIRGIN AND CHILD

MILAN, AMBROSIANA, ROOM D, No. 15

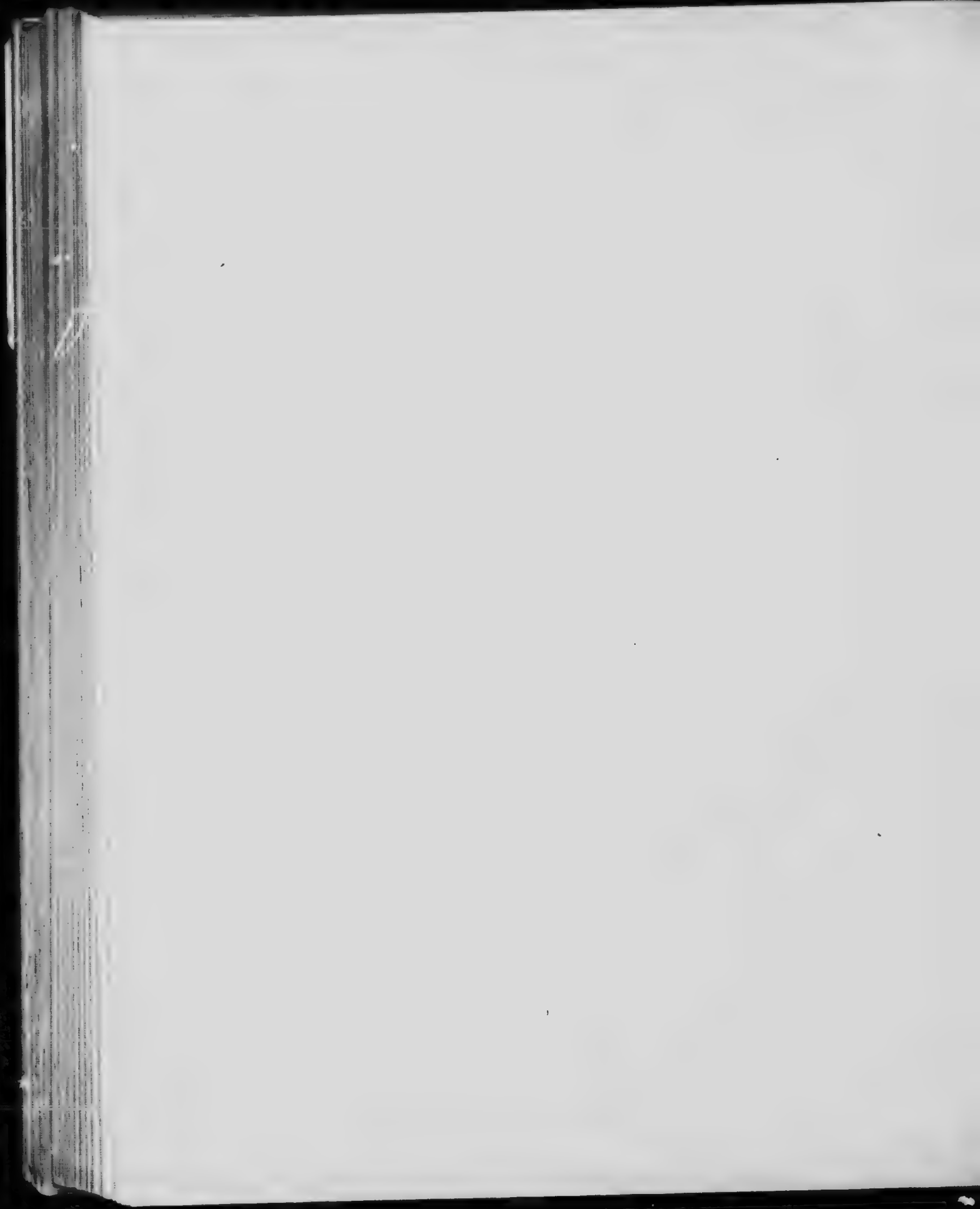
**I**TS admirable preservation would alone make the little *tondo* of the Ambrosiana noticeable among Botticelli's works. Its rich, varied colour is unspoilt by cleaning or restoration, and no thick varnish or scouring of surface has obliterated the sure and easy touches with which the master has thrown his conception upon the panel.

The picture is very slight. Close analysis of the handling discovers such dexterity as comes very near to trickery. The proportions of the figure and the relations in size of the different actors are careless. The composition is haphazard, the various motives are somewhat confused and meaningless, and all appear to have been used before in other contexts. All this argues a somewhat late date, though the air of untroubled innocence, the serene divinity of the picture, seem strange among Botticelli's later visions. The illustrations to Dante's *Purgatory* and *Paradise* provide a parallel, and there, too, conscious decorativeness of line is paramount.

Nothing is known of the history of this charming panel.







## THE NATIVITY

LONDON, NATIONAL GALLERY, No. 1034

THE *Nativity* in the National Gallery is the only picture by Botticelli which is signed and dated.

The date is very obscurely given in mistaken Greek symbols, but it can only be 1500; the name is Alessandro alone. These facts are imbedded in an allusion, by reference to the Apocalypse of St. John, to the sufferings of Italy and the approach of relief, when the devil shall be chained and 'we shall see him trodden down as in this picture.'

The allusions are early enough to the prophecies of Savonarola and the troubles which followed on the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent, especially the much dreaded progress of Cæsar Borgia through Italy. Botticelli certainly believed with the followers of Savonarola that the Church was shortly to be reborn, and in this picture he seems to be representing less the Nativity of holy story than the promised renewal. The two figures on the right of the manger are probably the shepherds, and the three to the left may be the Magi, represented without any of their accustomed magnificence; but the other figures are purely symbolic of faith and joy and

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

glory, and of the devil trodden underfoot, in accordance with the inscription.

The date upon the picture fixes precisely the moment when Botticelli's imagination and representation took these forms. It was towards the end of his life that he flung away the sustained dignity and restraint of his maturest works and threw upon his canvas the red-hot vehemence of his visions. There is a unity of line and pattern still, though it is much less careful than it was. But the figures sacrifice structure to movement. In one respect they gain by the change; the meaningless contortions of drapery which served to hide imperfect draughtsmanship in female figures have now become, upon the whole, powerful indications of action. The absence of decorative exuberance shows itself in the figures of the central group as positive archaistic severity. In this picture beauty of colour and of movement still remain. Elsewhere, in pictures of the period, everything is sacrificed to vehemence of action and intensity of meaning.

A number of details in the picture, from its general composition of the groups to the drawing of the trees and the character of the rocks and path, recall the illustrations to Dante and serve as evidence that Botticelli's work upon them lasted until his later years.

The picture is on the whole well preserved. Some of its gilt and pigment has been rubbed off and its once brilliant colouring has darkened. It is the first picture by Botticelli recorded as having left Italy. W. Y. Ottley, the famous connoisseur, bought it in Rome about the

## THE NATIVITY

beginning of the nineteenth century. It failed to obtain a bid above £42 when put up for sale in 1811, and was bought in. In 1837 it reached only £25, 4s. Its purchaser on that occasion sold it in 1878 to the National Gallery for £1500, about one-tenth of the sum paid in 1911 for one of the series of pictures with the story of San Zenobio, which shows as many of the faults of Botticelli's decline as the *Nativity* shows virtues.









## WORKS WRONGLY ASCRIBED TO BOTTICELLI

XXII

### MADONNA, CHILD, AND ST. JOHN

CIRCLE OF BOTTICELLI. LOUVRE, No. 1296

IT is not possible to divine what may lie hidden under the thick coats of varnish upon the *Madonna* of the Louvre. Certainly there is an attractive picture with a languorous Madonna leaning her head upon her Child, against a background where a few trees and roses stand in strong outline against the sky. The picture looks best from near; the farther away the spectator stands the more heavy and distorting become the badly modelled shadows. The varnish prevents the solution of the questions whether these do or do not belong to the original painting and whether beneath it there lies an authentic work of Botticelli, repainted until the chief characteristics of his hand are lost, or only the work of some unidentified and imperfectly skilled painter who caught no little of Botticelli's manner without imitating him throughout.

A repetition of the theme in a picture at Dresden is more definitely in the manner of Botticelli's school, and proves that, whether or not this be a work by the master,

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

it has its origin in his vicinity. The type of the *Virgin*, though unlike that given by Botticelli to the Madonna in any picture which can with security be assigned to him, is not far removed from that of the central Grace in the *Spring*, while the hollows which distort the face in this picture are only exaggerations of the extreme modelling which occurs also in the *Spring*. But with the exception of the hard painting of the accessories this is the only definite point of contact with Botticelli. The remainder, whether good, as in the background or in the dress and the veil—alike, apparently, the result of repainting—or bad, as in the hands and the *St. John*, shows an excellence or an imperfection which in the present condition of the picture do not appear to be Botticelli.











XXIII

MADONNA, CHILD, ST. JOHN  
BAPTIST AND AN ANGEL

SCHOOL OF BOTTICELLI. NATIONAL GALLERY, No. 275

**B**OTTICELLI to most English people—and England is almost the country of Botticelli—means the pretty *tondo* of the National Gallery. The Virgin with her gently rounded young face, her air of childish innocence, her slightly parted lips, and her eyes placed far apart in an attitude of somewhat conscious mystification, has done more than influence art; it has actually created a fashion of beauty, stereotyped an expression. Its colour, clear and delightful, but somewhat grey with the faded quality which Pater noted and admired, is the colour which those who have not been to Florence associate with Botticelli. The spirituality of the Angels and their morbid listlessness appeal also to the sentimentalist who imagines that this type of exaggeration is the true characteristic of the Quattrocento.

Yet the picture cannot be by Botticelli himself; possibly not even the design is his. The detail which is nearest to his work is in the *Infant Christ*; His attitude and the strong outline and careful if rather wooden naturalism of drawing are both in virtue and in fault akin to Botticelli's

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

style. But the woodenness of both the Virgin's and the Infant's hands and the excessive fragility and bad drawing of the angels, the mechanical character and the lack of feeling in the composition accord too badly with the general style of the picture to be anything but pupils' work. When Botticelli showed these faults he did not combine them with such sanity as is expressed in the general design and colour of the Madonna and the Infant. Add to these contradictions the unfamiliarity of the Virgin's features, and there can be no doubt that this is not a work of the master but a patchwork—very delightful perhaps, but still a patchwork—of various of his features executed by a pupil's hand.

A statement on the frame of the picture shows that it was once the property of Botticelli's younger contemporary, the architect Giuliano da San Gallo. An attempt has been made by Dr. Richter to credit him with the painting of the picture ; but there is no evidence for this. Without such an authorship, it is quite sufficiently interesting that this pupil's work should have been thought worthy of possession by a man who was thoroughly familiar with, and could no doubt have owned himself, authentic works of the master.









# PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN

CIRCLE OF BOTTICELLI. BERLIN, No. 106A

THE two works last considered, if they be not Botticelli's, are at any rate attractive. The *Portrait of a Woman* at Berlin possesses neither the quality of beauty nor the interest of authenticity. Neither its virtues, if it has any, nor its vices are Botticelli's. He had faults enough, but they are not those of this picture. His contour was hard, but it was not weak as it is here; his drawing was not always certain, but it was not meaningless as in this picture; he had a fondness for the intricacies of tresses bound up in their own coils, but he did not bind them together with such distortions nor cause them to be so paramount a feature as they are in this picture.

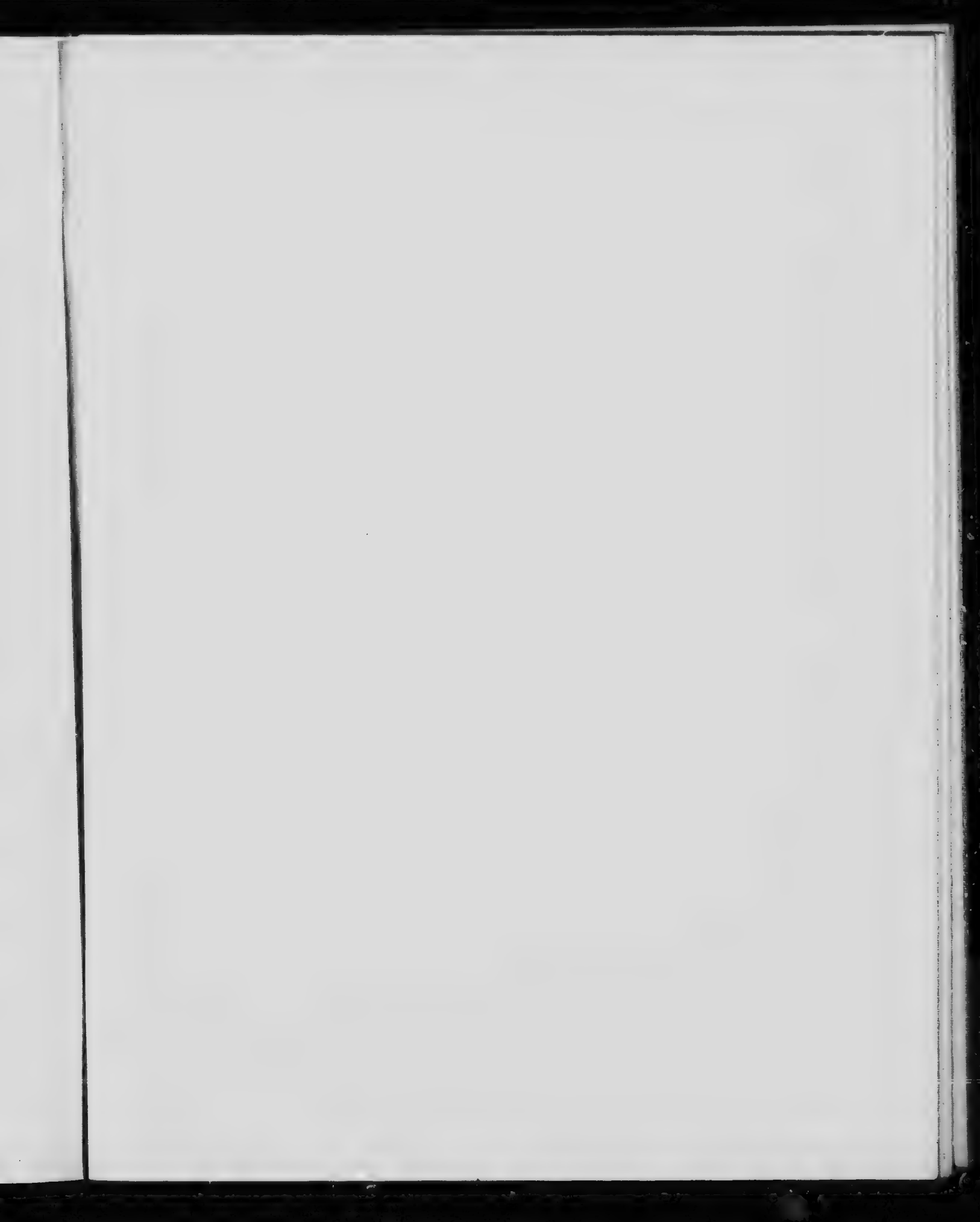
Nowhere is there so good an example of emptiness eked out with mistaken decorative extravagances as there is in this head. The face does not hold together in structure; a black background is introduced to give it force. The head is plain; its headdress must be decorated and elaborate. The head does not fit upon the neck; a band must hide its failings. Even the bust and arms must be



## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

accompanied by pearl-covered hair and gaudy, slashed dress to hide their ill-arranged weakness.

The picture is an epitome of all the vulgarities of the Quattrocento. To credit it with the name of Botticelli is not only to ignore his virtues but also the efforts which led him into his own excesses. That it issued from his studio is conceivable; but if this is so, it is at once a condemnation of his methods and a disproof of the notion that the studios of the Quattrocento were any whit more conscientious than those of the succeeding century when the so-called decadence had set in.









## TOBIT AND THE ARCHANGELS

FRANCESCO BOTTICINI. FLORENCE, ACADEMY

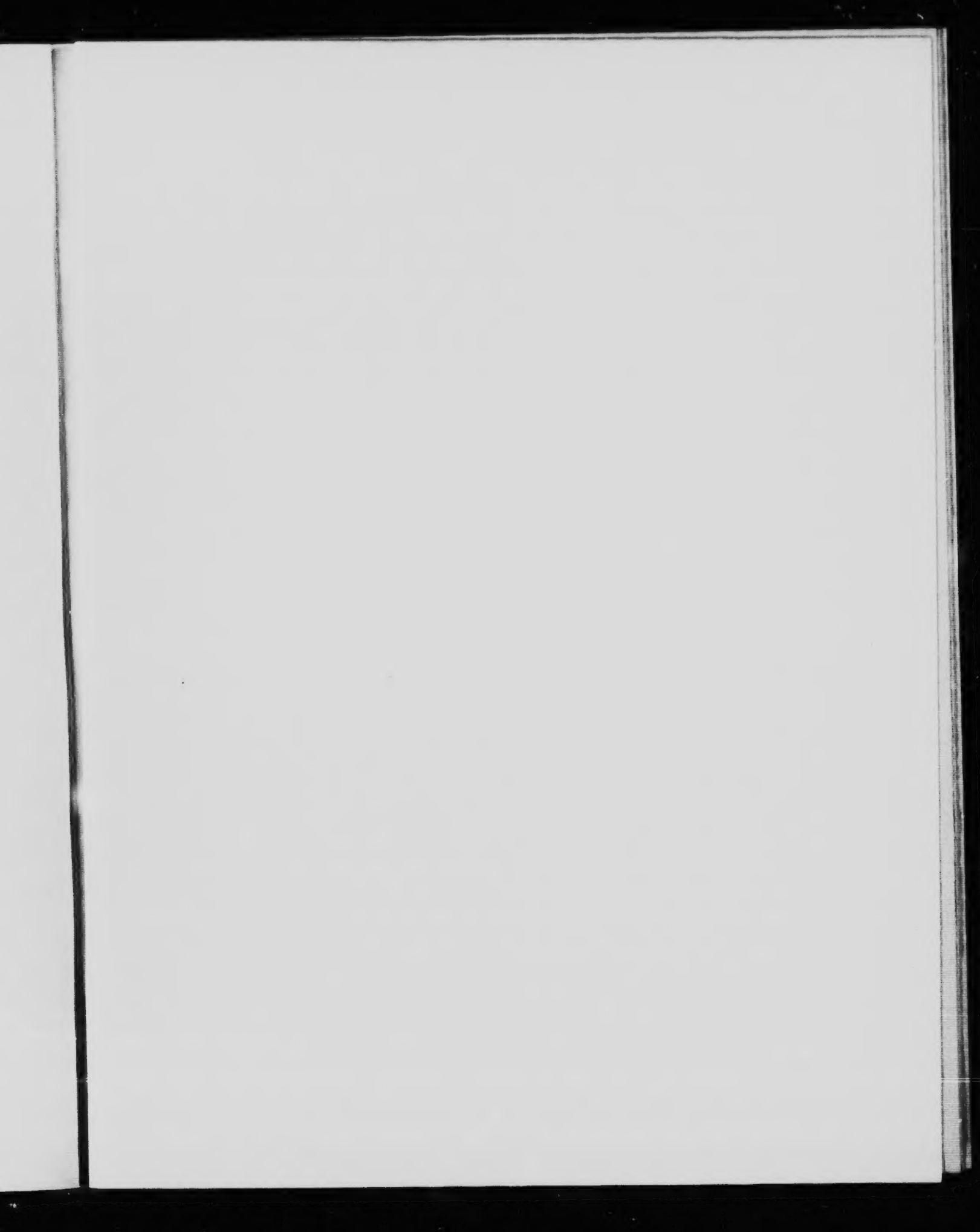
ONCE attributed to Botticelli, the picture of Tobit and the three Archangels is now generally supposed to be the work of his occasional imitator, Francesco Botticini, a painter of the fifteenth century, who, in his various manifestations, exhibits the mannerisms of different artists of his day. In the Palmieri altarpiece at the National Gallery, also ascribed to Botticelli, he comes nearer to his manner. Here he parodies the eccentricities of the decorated school which dishonours its origin in Verocchio. That the picture could ever have been taken for a work by Botticelli only shows how slowly the true character of his work has come to be recognised.

Certainly Botticelli in his early work, such as the *Judith*, exhibits a tendency to make his figures trip because he cannot make them walk with life or dignity. *Fortitude* herself has not the strength to sit firmly on her throne. Even in the *Spring* he combines his figures uneasily and tends to over-decorate their drapery, and to the end he is forced to have recourse to bulky draperies with large piles of folds in order to mask the uncertainty of their limbs and the want of strength in their attitudes. But

## SANDRO BOTTICELLI

never is he so completely a compound of fantastic flourishes as in this calligraphic exercise upon a worn-out theme. Botticini has nothing to say that has not been said a hundred times before; he has no new insight into either the spiritual conception of his incident or the forms of his characters. Therefore he over-elaborates their exteriors with adventitious decoration and forces into excess all the superficial and decorative characteristics which marred his models. This is not primitive exuberance or excess of riotous youth, but the florid rhetoric of a premature decay.











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